

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1908.—VOL. LXXIV.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 25, 1899.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"YOU ARE QUITE SURE HE IS QUIET?" SAID BELLE, ADDRESSING THE GROOM.

BELLE'S FOLLY.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

A SCORCHING day in August, the hot sun drying up the little moisture remaining on the thirsty ground, left there by the refreshing rain of the preceding evening, rendering it perfectly safe for a pair of little feet to tread over the soft grass encased but in a thin covering supposed to be shoes, the most sensible part of them being the high heels, which, although they gave the wearer the appearance of walking on stilts, at least guarded her from the ill-effects of the damp earth. But to Belle Anstrane such an idea as catching cold never entered her head. She had scarcely known a day's illness during her five-and-twenty years of life, and had even been so wicked as to rebel against the goodness of Provi-

dence that he should exempt her from sickness, bestowing on her such robust health when at one time she had longed, even prayed for death.

But that was all past, and she was thankful now that her prayer had not been answered. She was far too young, too beautiful, to die; and what a lovely world after all, it was, she considered, when reclining on a rustic seat beneath the boughs of a shady oak, she looked beyond on the deep blue of the cloudless sky, against which the dark trees apparently rested in the distance; and then the wide expanse of verdure, green and yellow, stretching as far as the eye could reach, and she the mistress of each fair acre.

So the warm sun came slanting through the branches, vainly trying to kiss her as there she lay, in a waking dream, thinking, thinking of the years that had flown, and the skeleton hid away in her cupboard, whilst she lived on, loving life as she had never done before in the first bloom of her maidenhood.

"Bah! what an idiot I am to let that worry

me now!" she said, with an impatient gesture, after which she made herself even more comfortable, and opened the volume she had brought with her; whilst the bees flew past, humming at their daily toil, and the birds twittered and chirped in the boughs overhead.

A little Maltese terrier had stretched himself by the side of his mistress, equally intent on the lazy enjoyment of basking in the sunshine; but whether it was the heat, the song of the birds, the hum of the bees, only a short time elapsed before both were unconscious of the sounds around them.

How long they had slept Belle could not say, when "Snow," who was the first to awaken, aroused her with a joyous bark; and then two baby arms were thrown around her neck, and a little girl, accompanied by her nurse, stood by her side.

"Oh! so naughty mamma, to do so 'leap now, and d'op 'oor book!" the child said, picking up the fallen novel, when Lady Anstrane for the moment looked around in a dazed sort of

way; then taking it from her hand she laid it on one side, whilst she lifted her to her lap.

She had had a frightful dream during those few moments in which she had closed her eyes, and the remembrance of it for a short time elung around her in forcible reality, only dispelled when the baby lips were pressed to hers; and then came to her the certainty of all the blessings she possessed until she laughed at her foolish fears, with that spectral finger still pointing at her in the distance. But Belle was not the woman to allow any passage in her past life to interfere with her present happiness.

That was all gone now, buried with her girlhood, and she was the wealthy Lady Anstrane, the envy of most of the women in her circle, who would have given worlds could they have taken one peep into that which she kept so closely guarded in her own bosom.

So she showered kisses on her five-year-old daughter with the nurse standing by, and "Snow" not at all liking that so much affection should be bestowed on his rival. But a shadow thrown across the grass caused both to look up, when a gentleman supporting himself with the aid of a stick, advanced from behind to where they were seated.

He was a man of sixty, who, but for his crippled limbs through repeated attacks of rheumatism, and his hair, which was almost white, might have passed for much younger; but that he was a Jew no one could mistake.

The face was free from wrinkles, save when a spasm of pain would contract his features. But whilst the eyes at one glance could detect any deception attempted on him in the value of most articles he purchased, through an old man's love for the beautiful woman he possessed he was blinded to that of the one he most prized—his wife.

"You here, Belle!" he said, throwing himself on the seat by her side. "Jackson told me you were somewhere in the grounds, and I have been searching the gardens through until it struck me you might be in this direction."

She turned as he spoke, putting down the child, who had clambered to her knee, whilst the slightest shade of annoyance passed over her countenance. But it was gone in a second, when, with a smile—

"Why, dear, I thought you were scarcely able to walk across the room when I left you asleep on the sofa!" she said.

"Nothing like business, or being bothered about other matters to make one forget their ailments," he answered, with a twinge of pain. "If you left me asleep, Belle, it was not long I was allowed to remain so. First Jackson asks me if I would see the head-gardener for a moment, and no sooner have I finished with him on the subject of some particular geranium he has reared, and wants my permission to enter in the list for the Floricultural Show, shortly to be held in the grounds of the Duke of Banshire, than Jackson again makes his appearance respecting a person who has called to solicit me as a patron for some out-of-the-way society; and, after having disposed of that interruption, more to the satisfaction of myself than the gentleman in question, I close my eyes once more, when our demon butler again enters to say the new head-groom came in this morning, and would I like to see him."

"Has Robertson left, then?" Belle asked, whilst toying with the golden ringlets of little Miriam, nurse having moved to a respectful distance on the appearance of her master.

"Well, yes," her husband replied; "since that kick he had from the chestnut mare he has never been as he was, and the fellows under him took advantage of his not being able to hunt them up as he did when his legs were perfect, so I told him he had better resign, and I would make it all right for him."

"Poor fellow. I am sorry!" she answered, in a listless kind of way, her fingers still entwined amid the silken threads of her child's hair.

"Would you rather I had retained him, Belle?" he asked, seemingly vexed that he should have thwarted her wishes, even in such a

trivial matter; but her telling him in an impatient tone that it was perfectly immaterial to her, further than she did not care for strange faces, the subject dropped, and when, a few moments after, they rose to adjourn to the house for lunch, all traces of annoyances had passed from her countenance as she bade her husband lean on her for support, little Miriam the while chatting by her side, and they treading down the velvet grass on their way to the house.

"I don't tire you, dear!" he asked, tenderly, when they had gone but a few steps, all the love of his heart welling to his eyes, making them kind and gentle as a woman's in his adoration for his girl-wife.

"No, no, Jacob!" she laughed, amused that he should ever look up to her—almost as dependent on her as their baby girl, and she but a child in years compared to him.

Love for this worn, decrepit man was a thing which had never entered her mind. In connection with him such an idea appeared a mockery. He was good, ever good to her, and she owed him so much that she could but feel grateful for all that wealth of affection he lavished on her.

There were times when she would weary of his attentions, and wonder, in her own mind how it was that men and women, whose ages and tastes closely assimilated, so quickly became matter of fact married people, whilst a man, old enough to be her father, became each year more devoted to her every whim, jealous even of the affection she bestowed on their own child, in the great love he bore towards her—even for her sake, had she desired it, renouncing the faith of his people, and striving to become a Christian.

He knew he had taken her to his heart a cold, passionless girl, selling herself that she might save an honourable name from the disgrace which threatened it; but he had told her he would make her to love him in spite of herself, that she should never regret the day she had gone to his arms, had become the mistress of his home, and he had kept his word.

She was now six years his wedded wife, and never had a taunt passed his lips of the reason she had given up all that is dear to youth that she should bear his name.

To him her past and its secret—and she had told him there was one—was a sealed book, until the aversion she first felt gradually gave way, and, like snow beneath the warm rays of the sun, so the coldness she evinced towards him by degrees disappeared. In a way she became happy, after having outlived a terrible fear, which in the first years of her married life followed her like a shadow, until she, after a lapse of time, coming to the conclusion she was but needlessly fearing that which might never occur, gave herself up to the full enjoyment of her surroundings, determined at least to repay, with affectionate gratitude, the great love this man had given her.

"Belle, love! tell me you don't regret!" he would say at times, when, maybe, a spirit of discontent would enter into her breast; and then his kind words would fall like oil on the troubled waters, and she would allow herself to be drawn within the shelter of his strong arms; whilst he would tell her how his whole life depended on her.

They had reached the drawing-room now where the low French windows opened that they could step from the green without to the velvet pile within, when gently assisting him over the one step she led him to a couch, placed where the hot sun could not reach him.

"There, now, you are quite fatigued, dear," she said, as he sank back exhausted amid the velvet cushions. "Rest there till I return, and Miriam will take care of papa, won't she?" she added, placing the child on a low stool by her father's side, when after stooping to kiss his forehead, she was gone.

And Jacob Anstrane merely pressed her hand, and then played with the little one's ringlets as she but a short time before had done, and his eyes followed until the door closed her from his sight, and Heaven bless her! was all he could bring his lips to utter.

CHAPTER II.

A few days after a new pony was brought to the Anstrane stables, a present from her father to little Miriam, and he suffering at the time from a severe attack of his old complaint, Belle consented in his place to accompany her to visit her pet in his stall.

So shortly after breakfast, with nurse for escort, she proceeded with the child to where a servant was awaiting them; the pony already saddled and bridled, that the little girl might have her first lesson in horse-riding round the extensive yard which ran at the back of the house.

Robertson was gone, and in his place the new man stood by, whilst an under-groom adjusted the straps, assuring that all was safe.

He touched his hat as Belle approached; a slightly built fellow, with a dark tanned face, as though he had been in hot climates. He was closely shaven, his hair cut short, giving him a smart appearance, but nothing in his demeanour to cause her to give more than a cursory glance to where he was standing.

"You are quite sure he is quiet!" she said to the other, patting the pony, as Miriam, in childish delight, was placed on his back.

"Oh! yes, my lady! quiet as a lamb," was the reply, and then placing the ribbons in the baby's hands, they moved slowly forward.

"Is that the man who has taken Robertson's place?" Belle asked, for the first time, alluding to the head-groom, who still stood watching them, as they walked round the stable-yard, when receiving an answer in the affirmative she said no more until, having come round to the spot from whence they started, she turned as he advanced to lift Miriam from the saddle.

"Just the thing for little miss, my lady!" he said, touching his hat and the animal at the same time.

But she made no reply. Something in his voice seemed to deprive her of the power of speech. It was only momentary though, and then she felt how foolish she must appear in the eyes of this servant, so she took the child from him as he placed her on the ground.

"You have only just come to Anstrane Court, I believe!" she said.

"I have been here three days, my lady," he replied, his dark eyes raised to hers, and then she moved away with those eyes following her, until, passing through the small door which led on to a gravel path beyond it had closed behind her.

And still he remained where she had left him, when in her cold, proud way she had paid no further heed on receiving his answer than to take the little girl from him and lead her from the yard, followed by nurse.

"What is the matter, man!" the groom said, while he proceeded to remove the saddle from the pony's back. "You seemed scared like!"

Morton smiled. "I was thinking," he said, "it was strange such a beautiful young lady should marry Sir Jacob, a man old enough to be her father. Do you think she can be happy?" and he began filling a pipe he had taken from his pocket whilst he awaited the other's reply.

"Well, if she ain't she ought to be," he answered. "Talk about an old man's darling, why, if she could eat gold the master'd give it her, and I can tell yer that notwithstanding her beauty, and bein' the daughter of a gentleman, it wasn't every one who would have married her."

"No! How was that?" Morton asked, striking a light on the sole of his boot.

"Well, you must know, my lady had a brother about as wild as they make them, so folks say; he spent all his own money, his father paid his debts until he declared he would pay them no longer, and then he spent other people's, until bills became dishonoured; the Jews threatened, and, altogether, things got into a pretty mess. Can't you get a light?"

The last remark caused him to break off, that he might do Morton a friendly action by placing the bowl of his pipe close to that of his companion, who had been striking match after match

with the same result, that they went out as soon as invited.

"Thank you. And what became of the brother, after all?" he asked.

"He went to the dogs as fast as he could, till in addition to his other accomplishments, he tried his penmanship on the name of a friend to the tune of a few thousands. Sir Jacob discounted the bill, and young Cathcart shortly after found himself in prison on a charge of forgery."

"And was he convicted?"

"Rather; and sentenced to seven years' penal servitude. Poor old Mr. Cathcart went on awfully, saying he had killed his only son, and sending day after day for the old Jew, to see if they could not in some way prevent the sentence being carried out. It was then that Sir Jacob saw Miss Belle. My young woman was housemaid there, and that's how I comes to know all about it."

"And so he was transported?" Merton said, referring to the brother.

"No! he wasn't; for the governor here promised Mr. Cathcart that if he would give him his daughter in marriage he would save his son. How it was managed I can't say, but howsoever, Sir Jacob got him released, and the day he left England a free man Miss Belle became Lady Anstrane."

"I thought as much," Merton answered, in a tone so hard and bitter that the groom looked at him in surprise, when he added, "I suppose she was as anxious to become my lady as he was to make her so. Women are all alike, rich or poor; where one will sell herself for money, another will look on a title as her marketable value;" and he knocked the ashes from his pipe so violently that the bowl was broken from the stem.

"Well! I have a better opinion of the fair sex," the younger man rejoined, his thoughts reverting to his young woman, to whom he had been married now almost as long as Miss Belle had been to Sir Jacob.

But Merton made him no answer; whilst he kept his head averted, apparently intent on the damage done to his pipe, until saying "he thought it was time they were moving," he threw it impatiently from him and then they walked on side by side, the under-groom holding the pony's bridle.

"Lastaway! it wasn't so with Miss Cathcart," he continued, returning to the subject which Merton seemed almost anxious to dismiss. "For my misse told me that at first she declared she would rather die than marry the old Baronet, but her father declared if she persisted in her refusal, he should look upon her as a murderess; for that her brother, Mr. Cecil, would never live to bear his punishment during the seven years they had given him, piling up the agony until the poor girl was driven almost mad; for not only was Mr. Cathcart determined that she should save his boy by becoming the wife of Sir Jacob, but that he would himself be prevented disgracing she was likely to bring on him."

They had reached the stable-door now, and he was leading the animal within when he felt Merton suddenly grasp his arm.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Lor, don't look like that, man!" the other replied, "one would think you knew most as much as myself."

But she hard, strange look was gone now, and the new groom laughed right out. "What should I know?" he said; "only I felt as how I should like to hear the end of the story, wondering how such a beautiful young lady could in any way disgrace her family."

"How! Well, then, by running away with —," but the words died on his lips; for, in raising his head, he almost gasped for breath on seeing but a few yards from where they were Lady Anstrane herself.

"Have either of you seen a gold bracelet?" she asked. "I must have dropped it in the yard. Look round, Robert, whilst I stay here."

The young groom touched his hat, beneath which his face had become scarlet; she the while impatiently watching until, on the other side of the square she could see him diligently

searching for the missing ornament, Merton standing at a respectful distance, awaiting her commands, as she remained there, her broad sunshade opened to shield her from the sun's rays.

Once Robert looked up from his task at the extreme end, when he thought he could do so without detection, and he fancied their positions had changed, giving the appearance as though they were in deep conversation; but it could have been but a fancy, for, when he returned, after having fruitlessly searched the entire space, Merton was where he had left him, whilst her ladyship was restlessly pacing backwards and forwards.

"Then you could not find it!" she said, viewing his empty hands.

"No, my lady," was the reply, "and I haven't escaped an inch of the ground."

"Well, have another look!" she answered, "and if you are successful let it be brought round to the house. My maid will give it me, but you need not mention it to Sir Jacob's man"; and then she moved gracefully away, passing through the door, which still remained open.

A short time after Robert again emerged from the stable, which he had re-entered, when the last of her ladyship's light dress had disappeared from view. Merton had been called away by one of the boys, and he was about to adjourn for his midday meal, when, in stepping where Lady Anstrane had but recently stood, he became aware of something which lay glittering on the stones beneath the rays of the noontide sun, and a puzzled expression passed over his countenance as he stooped to pick up the missing bracelet.

CHAPTER III.

SEVERAL weeks passed by, during which little Miriam had proved such an apt pupil that she had become sufficiently proficient in horse riding to deem it safe for her to take her daily exercise, accompanied but by a groom mounted on a large horse, holding the rein of her diminutive steed—sometimes Merton, sometimes one of the under-grooms, but mostly the first would be her attendant, on which occasions Lady Anstrane rarely was present to see her depart.

"Oh, I feel it is unnecessary, dear, to be anxious when she is with Merton," she said, one day, when Sir Jacob remarked that she had allowed their little daughter to go without, as was her custom, kissing, and not leaving her until she was in the saddle.

And then she turned to the window, looking out on them as they passed down the drive, with the broad-leaved trees each side, now turning red and yellow with autumn tints.

The child turned, kissing her baby hand, when a few moments after they were lost in the belt of foliage which hid the gates from view through which they passed.

And still Belle stood looking out—out on the emerald green of the wide lawn scattered slightly over with dead leaves, where the big oak stood.

The window was slightly open, and the fragrance of the honeysuckle as it hung over the trellis work of the adjacent garden entered within, whilst the occasional note of a thrush or blackbird mingled with the trill of the smaller birds.

She seemed to be unconscious to all around her, as with her fingers tapping unmeaningly on the window pane she still gazed with a far-away look in her dreamy eyes, whilst she lifted them to where the fleecy clouds like gossamer webs scudded across the clear blue of the heavens.

"Would you mind shutting the window, Belle?"

It was Sir Jacob who spoke. And then she turned, the sound of his voice apparently recalling her to the realities of life.

"Yes, dear," she answered, in the same sad, quiet tone which had come to her of late, "do you feel cold?"

"I seem to feel each breath of air too chill, Belle; but come here, darling, there is something I want to say to you."

She closed the window then, shutting out what to her was life itself, the scent of the flowers, the bird's song and the soft breeze which brought relief to her aching head, for it so often ached now, and she sat down by her husband's side, on a low stool which had been her favourite seat, but which for weeks she had rarely occupied.

"What is it, Jacob?" she asked; "don't you feel so well, dear?"

"I shall never be well again, Belle!" he replied; "but that is not what I wished to say."

He did not speak for a moment then, only letting his hand pass lovingly over the sunny braids of her golden hair, till lifting her eyes, which had become so sad of late, questioningly to his, it recalled him to himself.

"Can you forgive me, Belle, for the great wrong I have done you?" he asked.

"You wrong me, Jacob?" she answered, the while she almost shrank from his career, "you have been too good, dear, too good!"

"I could never be too good to you, my darling!" he replied, drawing her so near that the grey of his moustache swept her forehead. "And at one time I even hoped I had made you happy; but I know I was wrong, dear, and I want you to forgive me."

"Forgive you for what?" she gasped, for the time being forgetting all but that dread secret which had lain so long at rest that she had almost ceased to remember its existence, till at a moment when she had felt most secure it had arisen before her in its enormity.

It was then that the cup of happiness she had lifted to her lips became as poison, that the love of her husband, which in its greatness had found an echo in her own breast had become a sin, and as these thoughts rushed through her mind her strength gave way, and she burst into a flood of tears.

And he, with his big heart breaking, he as he thought the cause of her grief, was nestling her closer, closer to his broad bosom, showering expressions of love on her ears, each word of which was as a serpent's sting.

"It was selfish, Belle," he said, "wickedly selfish, dear. You so young, so fair, and I, a broken-down old man, who had gone through life until saturated with all those pleasures of which you, in your youth, had never tasted; but I loved you as I had never loved before, and in that selfishness, dear, I determined to possess you, willing to wait for years if it should be, until you should love me in return. At one time I thought I had succeeded—that I had not waited in vain! and that if you did not give me all that depth of affection I gave you, you, at least—well, did not dislike me, Belle!"

She had taken his hand in hers now, her hot tears falling in great splashes on the white skin, whilst she pressed kiss on kiss on its smooth surface.

It was the first time that she had tendered a caress, and it was six years now since they had become man and wife.

"My darling!" he said, and then he knew that in all that time he had not waited in vain, that Belle loved him—loved him when it was too late; and yet, in that moment of her new born happiness, she could not tear herself from his embrace. Weak, ill, even crippled as he was, he was now dearer to her than all beside, and she lacked the strength to tell him of the great grief which yawned between them. So, with her head still resting on his shoulder, his warm breath fanning her burning cheek, she let him kiss away the tears hanging on her long lashes, whilst she drank in the words of love which, in this moment of unexpected bliss, he poured into her ears.

"My wife! my darling!" he said, "I shall die happy now, for I know that you love me!" and then he told her that, owing to the disease from which he was suffering, he could not live many years longer. "It might be," he said, "but a few months." And when a few days back, the doctor told him how the case stood, he almost prayed that death would soon come; "For," he added, "I thought my leaving you would be the kindest act I ever did!"

He smiled down on her then, that one short

hour in which he had learnt that she loved him having removed from his features the look of age which had become so habitual to them, whilst she clung to him so closely as though fearful that even then they would take him from her.

They were silent then, heart beating against heart the only sound audible, save for the gentle tick of the ornate clock which, on the mantelpiece, told how the moments were passing quickly by. Then, as the hour struck, it appeared to arouse her from her dream of happiness.

"Jacob," she said, nervously caressing his hand, which she still retained, "if anyone should tell you now, after all the time we have been together, that I was not worthy to be your wife, would you believe them?"

"If all the world, Belle, were to tell me you were ought but the pure dear girl that I know you to be, I would throw back the lie in their teeth!"

"Even should they give you proof of my unworthiness?" she asked.

He looked down on her then. A puzzled expression in his grey eyes, as they met hers, upraised a world of pain and dread in their blue depths; and then he clasped her nearer to his bosom.

"Heaven itself could scarcely make me to doubt you, my darling!" he said.

At that moment a shadow was thrown across the window where they were sitting, and Belle started to her feet. All the colour which had dyed her face but a short time since was gone now, while she moved, white as the driven snow, to where without, drawn close to the glass door, little Miriam was on her tiny steed, and by her side, helping her to alight, Merton, the head groom.

"Oh, such a lovely ride, mamma, dear!" the little one said, as Belle opened the window to receive her.

"And bringing Peter all over the grassplot, you rogue, spoiling my flower garden!" Sir Jacob called from the sofa, where he could just catch a glimpse of the pony's footprints on the soft, fresh-mown turf.

But to Lady Anstrane their voices appeared like those heard in a sleep, whilst, half unconsciously, she impressed a kiss on her child's upturned face, her own white like marble, with such trouble depicted on her every feature, which but a few moments since had beamed with happiness; and then, with a dry sob, which, in the agony of her mind she could not restrain, she turned to where Sir Jacob was, in his new-born joy, playfully listening to his little daughter's prattle.

CHAPTER IV.

To Sir Jacob the assurance of his wife's affection, which he had striven so hard to possess, seemed to have brought a new life, his ailments even giving way before the one thing which had made him feel that life was worth living, whilst with Belle, a melancholy, so foreign to her nature, seemed to have taken possession of her.

It was then that a letter arrived for her one morning, which had been forwarded by Mr. Cathcart.

It was from an old schoolfellow, who was in ignorance of the events which had taken place since they were together on a visit at her father's house, and so much had Belle's thoughts and time been occupied since then, that she had failed to keep up a correspondence with her girlhood friend.

"From Elise de Montarde," she said, replacing the letter in its envelope. "We have not seen each other for years, Jacob. She used to be such a nice girl, but after Cecil went wrong, and the tears started to her eyes, 'I let the friendship lie out. You know I could not tell her of the disgrace he had brought on us all, and they the best of friends.'"

And then she remained some seconds in deep thought, aimlessly stirring the coffee she was drinking, whilst her eyes still rested on the well-known handwriting.

"How would you like to invite her on a visit now, Belle?" Sir Jacob asked.

He was thinking how white and thin his girl-wife had become during the last few weeks, and that, maybe, the society of a companion of her own age might tend to recover her spirits.

She lifted her eyes to where he was seated at the other end of the breakfast-table.

"Do you think she might have heard and would decline the invitation, or, what is worse still, should she come and I had to tell her?"

"I do not see any reason why she should be enlightened," her husband replied. "Many years have passed since then. Cecil is abroad, and any gossip respecting his disappearance at that time was but a nine days' wonder!"

And so, at Sir Jacob's suggestion, Belle answered her friend's letter—a certain misgiving as to the wisdom of the step she had taken making her hand shake while so doing, and causing her to hesitate before finally closing the envelope.

But the thought of having someone to whom she could confide her troubles, who would sympathise with her as she had done years before when they were girls together, was too great a temptation to forego to her, who felt if there were no one to whom she could speak soon she should go mad.

So the letter was sealed and dispatched by that evening mail—an act she almost regretted as soon as she saw from the window at which she was standing the man depart with the post-bag.

"Is she French?" Sir Jacob asked, referring to the name, which appeared foreign.

"No, dear. At least only on her father's side," Belle answered; and then she fell into a reverie, hoping even to the last that Elise might refuse to visit them.

But by return an answer came, containing many effusions of love and affection, which had never lessened during the time they had been separated, and that she impatiently looked forward to the pleasure it would give her to once again meet her old friend.

"How silly of you to keep your marriage to Sir Jacob a secret," the letter went on. "It was quite by chance that I heard of it from a mutual friend, and I can assure you I felt quite aggrieved at receiving no cake; but, there, I suppose you did not know in what part of the globe I was vegetating. I shall be charmed to be once more in dear old England, and in the country, too, for I am getting quite sick of Paris and Parisian life. When we meet what a lot we shall have to speak of—old times and school girl freaks—and what about Cecil? Mr. Cecil I ought to call him! I hope he has not forgotten me," and then, with many expressions of love and friendship, it ended.

"Thank Heaven, she knows nothing!" Belle said, a relieved expression on her sad face as she closed the epistle.

A few days after Elise came—a bright-eyed vivacious little woman, with glossy black hair covering her well-shaped head in tiny curls, and all the attributes of the nationality derived from her father.

She expressed her delight in the most rapturous style, smothered little Miriam with kisses, declared Anstrane Court to be the loveliest spot on earth, and Sir Jacob, when his back was turned, the dearest old man in creation.

"But what in the name of goodness made you marry anyone old enough to be your father, Belle?" she asked, when, one morning, they were seated in the pretty drawing-room overlooking the extensive lawn now strewn with dead autumn leaves. "But there, I suppose the pill was so thickly gilded it was not so difficult to swallow," and she looked round on the articles of vertu scattered in rich profusion on cabinets and tables of value placed here and there in the elegant apartment.

But Belle affected not to hear, so that the question had to be repeated ere she gained a reply.

"It was not Sir Jacob's money that tempted me," she answered, her face scarlet.

"Surely it was not a love match?" Elise went on, while she noticed the effect of her words on her companion, remembering, as she did, the

straits to which the Cathcart family had been put at times, owing to the son's extravagance.

"Not exactly!" Belle answered. "At least, not at first; but Sir Jacob was so good to me, that, in spite of myself, I learnt to love him, and now I don't think anyone could have been so dear to me as he is!"

"And that is why you married him!" the other continued, fixing her dark eyes the while on her friend, as she noticed the colour come and go beneath the thin, delicate skin.

Belle looked up.

"It was more gratitude than any other feeling which induced me to become Lady Anstrane," she answered. "Cecil getting into a serious scrape, which would have involved my father in absolute ruin had not Sir Jacob extricated him from his trouble at the last moment."

"What a bad boy it was!" Elise replied, laughing. "And where is he now, the scape-grace?"

But Belle did not answer, for, suddenly remembering the saddle horses had been ordered for eleven o'clock, she reminded her friend that they had better prepare for their morning ride, as they would be brought round in a moment.

A short time after, and the animals were pawing the gravel in impatience, awaiting the arrival of the ladies, a groom leading each, whilst Merton, mounted on a splendid chestnut, rode behind.

Sir Jacob, with little Miriam, accompanied them to the hall door, standing on the steps until they were ready to start.

"My darling! what made you order Brutus?" he asked, advancing where his wife was seated on the back of a high-backed horse, who chafed and snorted in his anxiety to be off.

"Why not?" she returned, stroking and patting her glossy coat. "It is not the first time I have ridden him, and Elise has Lady Agatha."

"Well! be careful," was the reply. "I shall not be easy until you return, for you must know he has not been out of the stable for several days, and I dread your not having the power to control him if he should take it into his head to bolt, as he did a few months since."

"Ah! it was frosty weather then, dear," she answered. "He'll be all right, and so shall I, so don't get worrying yourself whilst I am away." Then asking Elise if she was ready, and kissing her hand playfully to her husband, she told Brutus to be off.

He did not require a second bidding, as with a neigh of delight he tossed his noble head, letting the glossy mane fall over the tiny-gloved hand which held the reins, and then he bounded forward.

"Look well to her ladyship!" was all Sir Jacob had time to shout to Merton, who followed in the track of the fair equestrienne, and then he stood watching until the last glimpse of the party was lost in the copse wood, the last sound of the horses' hoofs had died in the distance. When, turning to baby Miriam he saw her eyes filled with tears.

"I wanted to go too," she said, lifting them to her father's face, "Miriam hates that woman; she always takes mamma away," she sobbed.

"But, my darling, Peter" (referring to her pony) "could not have kept up with those big horses, you know! We will have our ride in the afternoon, you and I!" and then he led the child within, though it was some time before she would be comforted. "Papa always went so slow," she said, "and she wanted to go quick, like mamma and Brutus did."

It was a lovely morning, and save that where the golden corn had so recently waved stubble alone remained, one might have imagined the summer to be still there. The window against which Sir Jacob sat was open, giving entrance to a big bumble bee, who had wandered from the adjacent garden; but he buzzed round and round the pretty room, even resting on the delicate china leaves of a rose he believed to be real, until his tiny legs discovered his mistake, without attracting the least attention from his human companion, who still sat, his weary grey eyes fixed on the path where he expected some moment to see his wife return. But growing sick of flowers which emitted no scent, and leaves which did not stir, the bee went out into the soft

clear air, which had become cooler now, to listen to the birds singing so blithely in the branches, and still the man, with his white hair and sad face watched on, watched on till lunch had long been served, little Miriam had gone with nurse for her midday meal, and yet no sign of Lady Anstrane, and that sickening dread growling at his heart.

"Do you know where her ladyship intended rifling to?" he asked of the servant who had answered his summons.

"No, Sir Jacob," was the reply. And then he was about to leave the room when an exclamation from his master arrested his foot-steps, and advancing to where he stood—his finger alone denoting what in his terror he had lacked the power to speak—he saw in the distance to where he pointed a horse galloping at full speed, his sides decked with foam, as with dilated nostrils, from which the hot breath escaped like steam, and fiery eyes, he tossed the mane from his glossy neck, making the earth to fly from beneath his hoofs, which on his near approach sounded like thunder on the hard ground, and Brutus passed at head-long speed through the open gates.

"Lady Anstrane! Belle!" It was all the old man could say, when, with a groan, he sank to the floor, his eyes in their dumb agony alone telling what he suffered, for his tongue in that moment of his intense pain refused its utterance, his hand fell powerless to his side as it encumbered to the paralysis which had attacked his frame.

To ring for assistance was the man's first thought, and then together they lifted him to a couch before hastening to summon medical aid.

But it was not long before a messenger was dispatched, and Dr. Trebell was in attendance.

Yes, he had heard of the accident, he told the Baronet, when he was so far recovered as to listen to what he said, but Lady Anstrane and her friend were safe; the groom, Morton, the only sufferer, from a serious kick he had had from Brutus when in the act of exhorting her ladyship from him when he fell.

But Sir Jacob could not answer, merely raising the one hand untouched by the stroke to Heaven; and they could see his lips move as if in prayer, when the sound of carriage wheels were heard without, and shortly after Belle entered the room.

She was deadly white, and trembled visibly as she approached to the side of her husband, but was yet ignorant of the attack which had seized him, until unable to account for the presence of the physician, she knew but too soon that the voice which had never sounded but in tones of love to her was gone for ever, his eyes alone speaking to her of that great affection his tongue could never utter again.

"He may recover the use of his hand and side, Lady Anstrane," the doctor said, "but his speech, I fear, is irrevocably gone. I need not tell you he must have no excitement—rest and a mind free from every anxiety is the surest remedy. Good-bye. I will see you in the morning!"

He was gone then, the servant having followed him out; and then Belle threw herself on her knees by her husband's side, forgetting all but his suffering, whilst the tears she had restrained welled to her eyes, when a light step and the gentle closing of a door behind caused her to rise, and Elise had entered the room.

"They do not think he will live," she said. "I have only just left the cottage where he is; some internal injury, I believe, poor fellow!"

Lady Anstrane had risen to her feet then, in that one moment almost the hope that it might be so awakening in her bosom, when she remembered in what relation she stood to this man, who had but so shortly since saved her life at the risk of his own.

She gave one look at Sir Jacob, but his eyes were closed in a quiet sleep, when motioning to Elise, she moved from room.

CHAPTER V.

After it was known in the neighbourhood that Sir Jacob had become paralysed, those with whom they had been accustomed to visit called without

delay at Anstrane Court to not only make inquiries respecting the Baronet's health, but to sympathise with his young wife, who was congratulated on all sides on her providential escape, the story of her accident in being thrown from her horse also having spread like wild fire.

But after awhile, notwithstanding that Sir Jacob remained in a critical state, the interest in his welfare seemed suddenly to cease. Few called at the Court, and those who did were gentlemen unaccompanied by their wives or daughters.

Belle failed to note the change. She was so occupied with attendance on her husband that she was too glad not to be disturbed to study the cause; and not until he was again convalescent was she rudely awakened to the fact, that on occasions when they met she was noticed by the male portion of the families alone, whilst the ladies would give her the cut direct.

Elise was still her guest, having stayed with her during that trying time, and it was through her that she was first aroused to a sense of her situation.

The golden autumn was quickly passing away, and the first chill wind of winter had stirred the branches of the bare trees around Anstrane Court, where, in place of sweet-scented flowers exhaling their fragrance within open windows, all were closed now, and nought but empty beds with withered stalks remained, brown and sere, to speak of what had been.

There was a new head groom, too, to superintend the care of Peter in his stable, for Morton had succumbed to the injuries inflicted by Brutus' iron hoof.

Lady Anstrane had been sent for to the cottage where they had taken him when the accident occurred, and where he remained until his death, the doctor declaring a removal would only hasten his end; so his belongings were packed and sent to where he was, her ladyship promising to defray every expense.

"What less could she do," the gossip said, "for a man who had lost his life in her service?" for from the first all knew he would die; but tongues began to wag when, after his funeral, the incidents of their last meeting had oozed out.

How she had knelt by his bedside, at the time Sir Jacob was laid up, placing her ear close to his lips that she might catch his last words, sobbing all the while like as if her heart would break, and then she actually pressed her lips on his at the final parting, the woman declared, who owned the cottage and had been deputed nurse.

"And didn't he say anything, or was he too far gone?" they asked, to whom she was relating the story.

"He was almost then gasping for his last breath, when I went in on tiptoe," she answered. "My lady was holding his hand, and he lookin' into her eyes quite lover-like, and I heard him say—"

"Be thankful I'm going, Belle," and that was the last he spoke."

"Belle! her ladyship's name!" they exclaimed.

But no more was known until he was laid in his grave, in a spot selected by Lady Anstrane herself where the branches of a weeping willow waved overhead, drooping until they touched the green turf, and there they put him to rest, a pure white stone, with his name engraved on it, placed at its head.

And then it was that among his goods and chattels, which were carefully collected, the secret, so closely guarded, came to light, and all knew why it was that her ladyship's name was the last on the dead man's lips—all but Sir Jacob, who was as ignorant of its existence as Belle herself, that it no longer remained in her own keeping, until that morning when Elise told her she must leave Anstrane Court.

"I am sorry to go, Belle," she said, "but under the circumstances it is impossible I can remain. My parents, you see, won't allow me to," and she handed her an open letter.

It was from Madame de Montarde to her daughter.

"I insist on your returning immediately, Elise," she wrote, "before the disgraceful story, which must sooner or later reach the ears of Sir Jacob, becomes public scandal."

Lady Anstrane let the letter fall from her hands, raising her eyes in all their agony to the face of her friend.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

"You ought best to know," was the cool reply. "Now I understand why ladies no longer visit the Court; and for the sake of my own reputation, Belle, you cannot expect me to remain."

And then she told her, in no way sparing the pain she knew she was inflicting, the gossip which had been current in the neighbourhood, carried from maid to lady, until all were in possession of the means whereby to crush its beautiful mistress, of whom most had been jealous, for the wealth and loveliness she possessed.

And she knew then that the skeleton she had hoped to have hidden in her own closet had been gazed on by all. How could she deny to the girl before her that which she knew to be too true! To tell her she had aimed in ignorance would be believed by her no more than by the world itself, not that that would cause her unhappiness, if from Sir Jacob she could but hide the facts in their terrible reality.

"Elise," she cried, bursting into tears, "I did not, indeed, mean to cause you any regret that you should have stayed with me. I was not so much to blame as you think. The trouble brought on my own shoulders I must bear; but Sir Jacob, dear, I would he, if possible, knew nothing. In his state of health, Elise, it might cause his death. Promise me, for the sake of the friendship we once had for each other, for the love I still bear towards you, that you, at least, will not enlighten him!"

She was sobbing bitterly now, her whole frame shaking with the intensity of her emotion.

"As far as I am concerned, Belle, you need have no fear; but others less kind, I am doubtful if they will show you that consideration. Crying is useless," she continued. "If you do not wish to arouse Sir Jacob's suspicions you had better dry your eyes and control your emotion. I will ring the bell if you will allow me, that your maid may prepare my luggage, for I am anxious to reach London by the evening, that I may cross to-night."

The cold, hard tone had its effect on the weeping girl, who, gathering together every effort, succeeded in controlling her emotion so far that all sign of such had passed when a servant entered in answer to the summons, and not until Elise had ascended to her room did tears bring relief to her overcharged bosom.

It was then, with her head buried in the pillows of the sofa on which she was seated, that her strength gave way; the fountain of her grief welled over, as heedless of all around her she sobbed out her great sorrow, when, the door gently opening, a tiny form advanced to where she was, and two baby arms were thrown around her neck.

"Did she make 'oo cry?" the child asked, smothering her with kisses, and when she turned, she raised her head to see Elise, who had followed in Miriam's footsteps.

"Good-bye, Belle!" she said, holding out her hand. "I shall be just in time to catch the last train. I ordered the carriage to take me to the station. I was sure you would wish me to do so, and here it is!" she added, looking out. "So good-bye, cheer up, and don't be foolish. Remember me to Sir Jacob, and make any excuse you like for my speedy departure. Good-bye, Miriam!"

But the child ran from her, clinging to her mother's skirt, as she would have lifted her in her arms.

A few moments later and she was gone, Lady Anstrane watching her departure from the window where she stood with her little daughter, until the last wave of Elise's handkerchief was lost to view; she had kissed her hand for the twentieth time, and then she turned to see her husband advance to where they were, leaning on the arm of his valet.

CHAPTER VI.

He pointed to where the carriage with Elise had passed out of sight, making Belle to under-

stand, by signs which she had learnt to know so well, that he had seen it depart with her friend.

"Her mother required her presence in Paris at once," she said, while the hot blood flew to her temples, drying cheek and brow in carnation hue.

"Es, and Miriam is so glad she's gone," the child cried, jumping to her father's knee, as he sank on the sofa from which his wife had so lately arisen.

He smiled whilst he passed his hand caressingly over her sunny locks, she nestling close to his bosom, as she whispered, referring to Edie,—

"She made my mamma cry, and I hate her;" and then she hastily descended from the position she had taken to pick up a piece of paper lying on the carpet, which had attracted her observation.

"Look here!" she said, giving it to Sir Jacob. "What's this?"

He took it from her, Belle the while vacantly gazing without on the broad lawn now becoming wrapped in a veil of mist. It was the letter from Madame de Montarde which she had dropped on the floor, but not until a sound resembling a groan of pain had aroused her attention was she aware that her husband, who still held it in his hand, had read its contents.

It was then he motioned her to his side, pointing to the written words which seemed to scorch and blister her eyes, while there came into his look of agony like that of a dumb animal.

He drew her towards him, imploring her by allent gestures to tell him what it meant, those cruel words which were eating into his brain; and setting his soul on fire, and she could answer him not a word, only clinging to him, and imploring him to forgive the wrong she had done him.

The wrong she had done him! She to him pure and spotless as the fresh-fallen snow, and could he doubt her now!—the thoughts passing through his mind the while she, like a penitent Magdalen, clung to his knees, her tears falling so fast on his uncovered hand; and then he lifted her from her lowly position, nestling her close to his breast, as but a few moments before he had fondled their child, the great faith he held in her goodness giving way before that dreadful doubt which in one agonising second had found place in his bosom.

Oh! for the speech, then, that was denied him, that he might crave pardon of her for that brief space in which he had mistrusted her—she pure as Heaven itself; and then he gazed into her eyes, kissing from them the tears he deemed too holy to flow for him, showing by his every action that intense love which blinded him to all but her beauty and goodness.

She arose after awhile more calm and peaceful, moving silently away, with his eyes watching and hanging on her every step, lacking even then the courage to tell him the dreadful truth, and he unconscious of the gulf opening at his feet.

And so she left him, not daring to break the spell which bound him to her, till, in the solitude of her own room, the enormity of the crime she was committing arose in redoubled force before her, and she sat down to write that which she could not bring her lips to utter.

Never till in that moment that she was about to turn her back on husband, home, and child, did she know how devotedly she loved the man to whom she was about to deal his death-blow, knowing, as she did, how her written words would snap the last thread of life in his already weakened frame, while little Miriam, lacking a mother's love, would be left to the mercies of a cold and cynical world.

The days were drawing in fast now, and though but early in the afternoon, the shadows were already growing over lawn and copsewood, darkening all objects around her, as still she sat by the table in her boudoir, holding between her fingers the pen which was to stab like a knife the bravest heart which ever beat; and her hand shook until the letters she would have formed became almost illegible beneath her efforts.

And then she became calmer, the writing less shaky, as her task proceeded in that room so painfully still, not a sound but the almost inaudible tick of the tiny clock, and the scratch,

scratch of the ceaseless pen, with an occasional splash the while a heavy tear would blot the page.

She had finished now, folding and sealing it carefully, nothing remaining to be done but to ascribe the name to whom it was to be given, when rising, she almost uttered a scream, whilst in the glass she viewed her own features, so drawn, so white, that like a ghost they appeared before her.

But a gentle knock at the door recalled her to herself, when hastily hiding the letter she had written she bade them enter. It was Annette, her maid, who proceeded to light the rose-shaded lamps.

"The first gong has sounded, my lady. Shall I assist you to dress?" she asked.

Only then, as she gave her assent, did she become aware of the darkness which had entered into the room where she was, unheeding all but the misery which had ended everything for her in this life, Annette wondering the while whether her lady was not ill, she was so quiet, so distraite, during the time she arranged her toilet for dinner.

But to Sir Jacob she never appeared more lovely than when she descended to the drawing-room where he awaited her. All the traces of her recent emotion had passed, leaving but a flush behind, which added to the beauty of her complexion, whilst her eyes were bright and sparkling under the influence of unusual vivacity pervading her spirits; and when the evening ended, and he retired early, as was his custom since his illness, she lingered long by his side, returning with tenderness the kiss he gave.

A short time after she ascended to her own room where Annette was in attendance, but it was not long before she was dismissed, and Belle was once more alone—alone with her dread secret, with her determination to quit the roof to which she had brought such sorrow. Her false gaiety was gone now, the excitement alone remaining, which gave her strength to carry out her resolve.

All was silent as the grave, when robing herself in a warm cloak, she prepared to take the step she felt was the only course left open to her.

Noislessly undoing the door she listened; not a sound pervaded the stillness, whilst for some moments she stood straining her ears before she moved towards the room where little Miriam lay unwrapped in the peaceful slumber of childhood.

It was then her fortitude forsook her, her tears falling fast on the silken coverlet, over which the fair rounded arm of the infant sleeper was thrown, her golden hair lying in rich profusion on the snowy pillow, and resting in miniature curls on the white forehead; whilst the colour, delicate as that of a peach, showed on her smooth cheek, and the while she gazed on the sleeping child, for that brief space her purpose wavered, but it was only a moment, and then she pressed a kiss on the face of the unconscious babe, the next she was gone from the chamber which held this, her greatest treasure.

She dare not trust herself to linger longer with the cords of love drawing her so tightly to her home; she stayed there but a second by the door, where in the stillness around came to her the heavy breathing of her husband, broken occasionally as it was with a moan of pain, and then with noiseless steps she descended the stairs.

A large dog who had made his bed on the mat at the foot arose as she came near, wagging his tail and licking her hand in his expression of delight; but at her bidding he lay down again, until the outer door closed behind her, and she could hear him whining pitifully in his loneliness.

It was then that the course she had taken filled her with dread, until she felt her brain would give way with the horror of her situation; but there was no turning back now, the door had shut which divided her from all so dear to her; and she went on, turning her steps she knew not whither, only flying from the shadow of that wrong which in her innocence she had done, until at length her

strength gave way and she sank down in her misery on the cold, damp earth, beneath the silent stars which looked down in sadness on the white still face.

CHAPTER VII.

How long she had lain on the grass, now beaded with the first frost of winter, Belle knew not, unconsciousness having mercifully come to her relief; and when again she awakened to the sense of her misery a lantern was turned on her face, and the sound of human voices came to her ears, and then the joyous bark of a dog leaping frantically with delight.

"Down, Pincher, down!"

It was the butler's voice.

"My lady!" he ejaculated, surprise and astonishment for the moment depriving him of breath, whilst Lady Anstrane again became dead to all around her; then, gently lifting her from the wet ground, he took her reverently in his arms and bore her to the house.

Up the white steps, glinting in the moonlight he carried his slender burden, and into the hall, never staying to summon assistance till he had placed her on a sofa in the drawing-room, where a few embers still flickered in the grate.

To tell Sir Jacob of the discovery he had made did not enter his mind. He was an old, valued servant, who had been with the Baronet almost as long as he had been master of the Court, and he knew there was some mystery attached to the circumstances under which he had discovered his young wife that might have, were he made aware of the fact, serious results on his own health.

So he laid her head with its wealth of yellow hair as tenderly as a mother her babe on the silken cushion, covering her with such wraps as he could immediately find, the while he replenished the dying fire, when, bidding Pincher watch during his absence, he ascended with shoeless feet to where he knew Annette was to be found.

It was some time, however, before he could arouse that young lady, and when he succeeded in so doing, a considerable want of assurance was necessary to persuade her that the house was not on fire before she could be prevailed upon to resist screaming, and to follow him quietly below where her ladyship was.

"My Heavens! she is cold as clay!" she said, touching her forehead, when, having entered the drawing-room, she advanced to where the dog still remained on guard by his mistress. "What does it all mean?"

"You know, Miss Annette," the butler replied, "May and December never did get on together, and I'm of opinion that my lady had made up her mind to leave the Court, which, had it not been for Pincher, she most certainly would have done in a very effectual way, for when I first saw her lying, as you see her now, like one dead, all in the damp and cold, it gave me quite a turn."

"But what had Pincher to do with it?" Annette asked.

"It was this way," he answered. "After all had gone to bed, I sat by the fire to smoke my last pipe before retiring to rest, when it struck me that I heard footsteps on the stairs, but paid no attention, supposing it was one of the servants, so I did not move until I had finished, when I thought I'd have a look round, and then go to bed myself. It was all quiet till I reached the hall, where Pincher, you know, stays at night."

"What is it, old fellow?" I said, for, instead of being asleep on the mat, as he generally is, he was whining and scraping at the door, running backwards and forwards to me, making me to understand that he wanted to go out. "Not to-night, my man," I said, and was moving away, when he whined so pitiful, and kept pulling at my sleeve, that, thinks I, there's something wrong, it strikes me, with which I open the door, and out he flies like a mad dog, only returning every now and then to see that I followed."

"And you went, of course?" Annette asked, while endeavouring to restore animation to the still unconscious form of her lady.

"I did, miss; for, thinks I, maybe there was some queer characters about, remembering at the time the steps on the stairs I had heard; so, when Plincher again came back, almost like a human creature, signifying where it was he wanted me to go, I allowed myself to be led by him, and glad enough I am now. But see, my lady is a-coming to; give her a little of this;" when, holding a glass to her, Annette forced a spoonful of brandy through the lips which till now has been so firmly closed.

A cold shiver then passed over her frame, and, opening her eyes, Belle looked around in a wild questioning gaze.

"Have I been here long?" she asked.

In that first moment of restored consciousness, the events which had so lately occurred apparently had passed from her memory, till perceiving the presence of the old butler, regarding her anxiously, with Annette kneeling by her side, a puzzled expression passed over her face, and then she closed her weary eyes to collect her thoughts.

But the remembrance of what she had gone through, the agony of mind she had suffered, seemed to have passed from her recollection, leaving behind but the faded memory of some frightful dream.

She could feel a cold chill which had passed through her body, that her limbs had become cramped and stiff, and she could still faintly remember sinking down on the wet, dank earth, and that was all—all else was a blank.

"You have been ill, my lady," Annette said. "But now that you are better you must allow me to assist you to bed. You have been sitting up too long!"

She made an effort to rise then, the girl's words reassuring her. It was but a dream then, that fight from her husband's roof, going she knew not, cared not whither, stumbling over roof and branch in her hurried haste away from all she held so dear—away from that shadow which ever dogged her footsteps.

"Will your ladyship lean on me?" Annette asked, "as you will be better in bed; the fire is going down again, and you are cold already."

"Yes. Oh, yes!" she answered, striving the while to recall her scattered senses, and then struggling to her feet, with the maid's assistance.

But her limbs were powerless to support her, all swollen and cramped as they had become; so, in his strong arms, followed by Annette, old Jackson carried her gently from the room, slowly, softly, with quiet tread across the tessellated hall to the stairs, where the thick carpets stifled each sound, until along the corridor above they reached her own bed-chamber, and there he laid her gently on the soft velvet of a couch drawn close to the fireplace, leaving her there alone with the girl.

But all through the night she lay sobbing and moaning in her sleep, tossing from side to side, her brain ever active, Sir Jacob's name at times, but oftener that of another Annette had never heard on her lips, when from the boudoir adjoining, where she had thrown herself on the sofa to snatch a few moments' rest, she would listen to her wild, strange talk.

The following morning Lady Anstrane was in a high fever, so she informed the Baronet, and a messenger was at once despatched from the Court for the nearest medical assistance.

It was then that in the face of the terrible sorrow which at the time threatened him, his own affliction seemed to give way, and for the first time he so far regained the use of his speech as to be enabled to give directions for his young wife's benefit.

But when the doctor, who had been summoned, told him there was no hope, for he could not bide the danger which was so imminent, his grief was terrible to behold. In that moment of his great sorrow all his manhood forsook him, while, with his aged head bent low, he sobbed aloud in the agony of his soul.

"Save her, doctor! save her!" he cried, throwing himself at his feet, clinging to his knees like one bereft, and that dreadful struggle to express the words he could not utter.

The physician gave him his hand, as he would have done a child.

"Sir Jacob, you are a man," he said, kindly.

"You must act like one. While there is life there is hope. Lady Anstrane has youth and a good constitution in her favour, but her life is in the hands of a higher Power than mine; it is to Him, not me, that you should kneel."

And like a child he rose, what he was suffering alone visible then in the stifled sob, the smothered groan, which, strive as he would, he could not fully restrain. And then they turned from the room where the fair face, now flushed with fever, surrounded by a halo of golden hair, lay with wide open eyes, ever watching, watching, the while she rambled on in her talk, so strange to those who were present with her.

The letter she had written on that night when she fled from his roof had been given by Annette to the Baronet, but with his mind resting on nothing then but the life so precious to him, which trembled in the balance, it had remained unopened—left where he had laid it down in the first great agony of his grief, until, as the days passed, and the faintest glimmer of hope presented itself, he became calmer, his very existence hanging on that one thread for consolation.

Even little Miriam, who had been neglected in those dark days when death like a pall hung over all, he nestled and fondled as he had never done before; it was sacrifice to her, he thought, to put aside, as he had done, the child she so treasured, and then the remembrance of the letter she had penned came to his recollection. It was ten days now since that night when Jackson had discovered her ladyship, with her pale face, on which the silent stars were sadly gazing, and as yet the seal had been unbroken.

It was scarcely like her writing, he thought, so illegible did the characters appear, while here and there a large tear had blotted the page; but it was her name at the finish, giving truth to that which otherwise he would have believed to have been a base and palpable lie. And even then he could scarcely credit his senses, and his brain whirled round like a mill it would give way beneath this new trouble which, like a bombshell, had exploded at his feet.

For a moment anger found place in his heart against the woman who had thus deceived him—the one he had loved with such devotion—as even to make him forget Heaven, and for this to find at the end how foully he had been betrayed, his honour trampled in the dust; she whom he had raised above all women, her name too pure for other lips, to be a dishonoured wife, a—; and then he buried his face in his hands, whilst the agony he was enduring showed itself in large beads of perspiration standing on his wrinkled forehead. But another second, and he had repented himself of the feeling which at first moved him.

She was so young, and he had urged her on, she lacking the love which would have kept her in the right path, whilst the safety of one dearer to her than life itself tempted her to risk all for his sake.

But she was not his was the agonising thought which kept passing through his mind, till reading further on a gleam of hope arose in his breast, and he thanked Heaven that it was so.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a long, long letter which Belle had penned on that momentous evening, page after page covered with words that had cost her a world of pain to consign to paper, causing at the end her reason even to totter on its throne.

"I am leaving you to-night, dear, dear Jacob!" she had written, "imploping you to forgive me for the wrong I have done you, and that you will not think of me so unkindly as I deserve; and, above all, keep from our child, our little Miriam, the story of her mother's sin! You know, dear, the circumstances under which I became your wife; that I had no love to bring you, my feelings even rebelling against the fate which had thrown us together; but for my poor father's, for Cecil's sake, I resolved to crush all that, fully believing myself at the time to be a free woman; and then it was years after that I

found my heart gradually giving place to that great love you had ever thrown around me, so cold, so impervious to your affection.

"I became happy then, our little girl cementing our union, and depriving it of that which had previously made it but a business transaction. Your noble nature, your gentle forbearance towards me in my waywardness, my rejection of every means you took to make my home a happy one, gradually warmed my better nature, and I found myself drawn towards you with something stronger than gratitude—with a love I thought never to have experienced in connection with yourself.

"It was at the time when Merton entered your service; you were ill then, and in your stead I accompanied our child one morning to the stables, that she might mount for the first time a new pony you had purchased for her but a few days previous. And then, like one risen from the grave, I saw before me the man I thought to have been dead years since. For the moment I felt like one in a dream, trusting, praying that I should discover it to be but the imagination of my brain. I was mistaken, finding but too soon that the recognition was mutual, and from that time I felt it was useless to deny that I knew him. Not a word passed between us then; but I had become so excited, so restless to hear his explanation, that after bringing Miriam away I returned, with some excuse that I might speak to him, even then nursing the hope that I was labouring under an illusion. But he only too fully assured me of his identity, and then I knew that when I became your wife I was already a married woman!

"Do not blame me, dear Jacob, until you have read to the end; for, indeed, I was more to be pitied, more sinned against than sinning. I was so young, scarcely sixteen, just returned from a fashionable school, my head filled with romantic folly, which grew more and more as I became aware of the beauty I possessed, until I pictured myself the heroine of every love-tale with which I crowded my brain. I had no mother to point out to me my foolishness; no one but my father, who was absorbed in business matters, and Cecil, who was rarely at home, and whom he was, only adding fuel to the flame by feeding my vanity.

"It was then that one of the servants in the neighbourhood where we lived, which was fearfully dull, attracted my attention. He was very handsome, and better bred than most of his class; his parents, as he afterwards told me, being respectable farmers, and that it was greatly against their wishes that he should go to service, they intending him to have entered some City house as clerk; but he could not have breathed in a stifling office, he said, and, therefore, loving horses so much he was determined to be a groom.

"It was quite by accident our first meeting, but to me the seeing him made the first break in a life which was frightfully monotonous, and I found myself looking forward with delight to the time when I knew we should see each other. For weeks no one was the wiser, and then the gossip began to chatter, and it came eventually to my father's ears. I was banished from home, fancying myself the while so desperately in love that the parting from my lover would kill me—he, when I told him how matters stood, kissing me tenderly, and declaring that we should never be separated, for he would take me where they could not find me, to his own people, and there we would be married.

"That evening I met him according to arrangement, and before night I found myself beneath his parents' roof. Of course they endeavoured to dissuade us from such a step, but finding all entreaties fruitless, and not wishing, as they said—good souls!—to get us into further trouble, they raised no further obstacles to our union. The following morning we started for London, fearing to remain too near my father's home. There we stayed with an aunt of his, and three weeks later were married at a registry office.

"It was not till some time after that the coals fell from my eyes. I began to see the folly of the step I had so hastily taken, when the surroundings of my new home talked so little with the picture of my imagination. At the same time my husband grew irritable, even throwing out hints

of the burden he had brought on his own shoulders through marrying a useless doll.

"From bad, things came to worse, until I determined to quit his roof. We had a serious quarrel, and I left him, returning to my father after a short six months—so worn, so changed that at first he scarcely recognised me. My husband did not follow me, and until three years I heard nothing of him, and then it was that he was dead.

"Then came the trial of Cecil's wrong-doing. My sacrifice, as I deemed it at that time, driving all other from my mind that I felt, when in our own stable-yard I looked upon my husband's face again, that it must be his ghost.

"I will not interfere with you, Belle," he said, when I had told him how I had been deceived, and that in my ignorance I had become Lady Anstrane.

"Then remain so, my girl," he replied, "not a word will ever pass my lips to oust you from your position. We were only boy and girl, then, you know, untaught to each other in every way, as many married folks are; but I did love you with a true, honest love, and by my actions now will prove it to you."

"I gave him my hand then, and he raised it as reverently as though it had been that of his queen.

"From that day we never exchanged another word, until that one on which he saved my life, receiving such injuries as to cause his death; and then I went to him, feeling pity for him at the last, and making the few moments he had yet to live, I believe, less painful at the end."

A few words more, and Sir Jacob had read all, remaining some seconds like one in a dream, his grey head resting on his elbows, which he had placed on the table, while the tears he could not control rolled through his fingers.

Not his wife, all the years he had loved her as his own; and then for a moment even anger found place in his heart, but was transient as a lightning flash, and his bosom was overflowing again with love for her, who even now was standing on the brink of eternity, as he sank tremblingly on his knees before the throne of his Maker.

"Save her! oh, Heaven, save her!" was all he could bring his tongue to articulate, but it gave strength to his weakened mind, and he arose a new man.

CHAPTER IX.

THE few words of supplication wrought from him in the agony of his soul had found grace at the heavenly throne. A few days longer and Lady Anstrane had passed the crisis. From a gentle sleep she had awakened, her brain free from the phantoms which had clouded her understanding, all remembrance of what she had gone through apparently vanished.

Sir Jacob was summoned to her side then, the joy of a child apparent on his worn face as he bent down to impress a kiss on her thin, wasted face, and then they brought to her her little girl.

"Mamma soon set well now," the child said, passing her baby hand over the yellow hair which lay in thick profusion around, and then laying her soft cheek close to hers so white and clear.

But at a sign from nurse the room was cleared.

"My lady must be quiet now, sir," she said, "or we shall be having a relapse."

So week succeeded week, and once again the roses showed beneath her fair skin.

It was then that, one evening, she seemed to be thinking on the past, endeavouring to recall to her recollection the events preceding her illness. Sir Jacob was by her side; he rarely left her now. And then it returned to her memory—her confusion, her fear, and subsequent flight. The rest was a blank; but had he read, she wondered, that which she had penned in that fearful night?

But she had no need to ask, for, as though divining her very thoughts, "I know all, darling," he said, ere she had time to question.

"And would you be very glad were I to tell you that your marriage with Robert McNaught, otherwise Merton, was not a legal one?"

He looked down on her then, her eyes uplifted to his, and he had read her answer there.

"But how? Oh! Jacob, tell me, dear, that, I have ever been your wife, and Heaven will, I feel, forgive me my other sin!"

And then he told her that, after reading her sad history he had caused inquiries to be made in the places she had named, when he discovered that a false entry had been made in the register, her age being stated at the time two years older than she really was, she still being but fifteen, and under her parents' control.

A gleam of happiness passed over her features then, her thoughts recurred to the little daughter, and she was content.

Not so Sir Jacob. "We will leave Anstrane Court," he made her to understand, "and, where only ourselves will know the reason, again will we stand before Heaven's altar, when not even the shadow of a wrong shall come between us."

And so, a few weeks hence, the Baronet and his young wife left England for a time, it was said to recruit their strength, though they feared the old gentleman was not long for this world. And they were not a little surprised when, two years after the Court was re-opened, Sir Jacob and Lady Anstrane returned, looking happier than ever, and he growing younger, they declared, and his speech almost as good as ever it was.

Little Miss Miriam, too, what a beauty she had grown! But she had a brother now; Cecil he was called—a fat, chubby, little fellow—so named after young Mr. Cathcart, who went wrong and died abroad, forgotten by all but his poor, broken-hearted father and sister, Lady Anstrane. But, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust; that is the way of all flesh, and he is dead now, surviving his son but one short month!

Because he was a faithful servant, is all the reason given when folks asked why it was that Merton, a groom, but in his service a few short months, should have a tablet erected to his memory in Anstrane Churchyard by Sir Jacob.

But her ladyship tells them no! It was because he saved her life at the cost of his own; and that is why she will each season bring fresh flowers, and place them on his grave.

[THE END.]

ONE of the few parts of Windsor Castle which have remained almost unaltered since its first construction is the Royal kitchen, which dates back to the reign of Henry II. It is true that in the evolution of things candles have replaced torches, and candles, in turn, given place to gas, and now electric lights are used for lighting. Gas is used almost entirely for cooking, although a few braziers are reserved for charcoal. At each end of the enormous room are vast roasting-ranges, with jacks and spits complete. The meat-screen, which is enormous, and dates back to Henry VIII. is of oak, lined with metal, and ornamented with the Tudor badge. The roof of the kitchen is so high that no odour of cooking is noticed.

The beak of the mosquito is simply a tool box, wherein the mosquito keeps six miniature surgical instruments in perfect working order. Two of these instruments are exactly counterparts of the surgeon's lance, one is a spear with a double-barbed head, the fourth is a needle of exquisite fineness, a saw and a pump going to make up the complement. The spear is the largest of the six tools, and is used for making the initial puncture; next the lances or knives are brought into play to cause the blood to flow more freely. In case this last operation fails of having the desired effect, the saw and the needle are carefully and feelingly inserted in a lateral direction in the victim's flesh. The pump, the most delicate of all six of the instruments, is used in transferring the blood to the insect's stomach.

A LIFE'S SACRIFICE.

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At sunset, in the month of October, a young man with a good face, and ragged boots, with clothes covered with the dust of the road, and utterly empty pockets, paused at a low stone gate and looked across a green lawn towards the porch of a pretty cottage. In this porch sat a lady in creamy white. At her side stood a boy of four years or more, dressed in a gay little costume of grey cloth, with crimson stockings and polo cap. Near them lay a great bull-dog chained to a post by the door. The man looked, hesitated, opened the gate, and entered.

"Madam—" he began.

"No," said the lady, shaking her head. "No. Go away immediately."

"She thinks I want to sell something," the man said to himself.

Then he spoke more loudly,—

"Madam, I only wanted to ask you if you would be kind enough to give me something to eat. I am really very hungry. I am walking to Sheffield to get work, and I have used up every farthing I had. It would be a great kindness if you could let me have a little food."

This time the lady rose.

"Go away!" she cried, briskly. "We allow no tramps here. This dog is dangerous. Come one step nearer and I shall unfatten him. Go away!"

Such a pretty, fairy-like little woman; had she no charity in her soul? It was strange to hear her.

The little boy, too, in his artistic dress, ran down the steps, picked a pebble from the path, and threw it with all his baby might towards the man at the gate. And the great bull-dog growled and strained his chain in a way to prove that he deserved the character given to him. The lady had advanced to the dog, and stood ready to unfatten the chain.

"I give you two minutes!" she said, in her high, sweet young voice. "We make short work with tramps here."

The man answered nothing. He merely turned and hurried out of the gate, and as he went he muttered curses, not loud, but deep. It was under his breath that he said,—

"May you need help and get none," he said, with an oath. "May you need it as I do this night;" but he meant it, every word. Then he sat down and buried his face in his hands. "A tramp!" he repeated. "Heaven knows I told her the truth, and she called me a tramp. And this is a Christian country, and that woman calls herself a Christian lady, no doubt."

From the kitchen of the house the wind blew the appetising smell of coffee to the hungry man; and the odour of some dainty hot cake came with it.

A cup of that coffee and a crust of dry bread would have helped him on his way with a lighter heart.

He had never in his life begged before. He swore he never would again if he starved on the road. He had worked for good wages since he learned his trade. He liked to read, and had the poetical justice of many a novel treasured in his heart. He had always been to church and been respectable; and he had never felt it his duty to refuse a beggar what he had to give.

He had not saved for excellent reasons—he spent all he had in keeping a plain little home comfortable for parents who depended on him.

Both were now dead, but his brother had needed help, having less energy than he had, with worse habits, and a poor little wife who resembled the

"Old woman who lived in a shoe, And had so many children she didn't know what to do."

Getting this small army off to the West had put him into a corner. Then came the hard times—the shutting down of furnaces and closing of mills.

He had heard of work in Sheffield, and was on his way there on foot. His clothes were good when he started, now they were covered with dust, and his shoes had worn out.

He had slept often in barns, eaten up his small capital, sold his portmanteau in one town where a lodging under a roof was necessary, and parted with all its contents at an old clothes shop.

He had done everything to keep from asking for help, and he was still the respectable man he had always considered himself.

Now, in this quiet place, he had asked a pretty little lady, with enough and to spare, to give him some food, and had been refused, threatened with the dog, and called a tramp. His soul burned within him.

The lady went back to her parlour shuddering. She was quite alone in the house, save for a little maid-servant, who shrieked and ran away in the face of any threatened danger, such as a mouse in the pantry, or mysterious noises in the cellar; and there had been one or two tragedies in the neighbourhood in which the tramp proper had figured ferociously.

People had given these creatures food, and had been robbed and murdered afterwards; had housed them, and experienced ingratitude of the foulest sort.

That a tiger was loose upon the lawn would not have been more terrible to think of than that a tramp was there. Still, she felt a little uncomfortable.

"If it really was an honest poor person," she thought, "how cruel I have been!"

Then she recalled the fact that the man who murdered the two old ladies in the next village had said he was a shoemaker out of work; and while Miss Letty was dishing him some soup, and Miss Betty crossing the room with a bowl of tea for him, he had struck them down with the hatchet, and then gone off with their little silver, three watches, some money, and poor Miss Letty's engagement ring, never taken from her finger since her lover died upon his bridal eve.

Besides, she had promised her husband not to let any idea of being good to the poor put her into danger of death, or worse, at a tramp's hands.

With all these excuses, Mrs. Carr, having a Christian soul under her fashionable bodice, was still uneasy.

The little maid was busy in the cottage kitchen. It was all bright and comfortable, and now she must drive to the station for her husband.

The man-servant had left them a day or two before, and they were going to the city so soon that another had not been hired; but she could harness her horse very well herself, and soon it was done, and the pretty figure perched itself on the cushions of the little vehicle.

Away they went, gay trap, frisky pony, pretty child and beautiful woman, making such a pretty picture in the twilight that Mrs. Stone, the artist's lady in the next house, called out to her husband,—

"What a picture that would make if we could only get it just as it looks against the sunset!"

Another pair of eyes saw the picture also. The man who had begged for bread and received a stone. He was making his way wearily along towards the railway. He might reach his destination; he might not.

Perhaps he could live on chestnuts and roadside apples. He would ask for nothing if he starved. No one should call him tramp again, or refuse to give the morsel he never refused a fellow-being in his life.

He was weak with hunger already, but he took his oath to that. And as he swore this Mrs. Howard's carriage rolled past him, covering him with dust from its red wheels; and the little boy, in his gay costume, cried aloud,—

"Mamma, there's that tramp again!"

It was as though he had thrown another stone which wounded him.

Paradise-on-the-Hill has a long carriage drive to the railway station. There is one spot which is very picturesque and beautiful. It is where the carriage road crosses a cut through which the railway runs between natural stone walls. The trains cannot be seen by drivers because of the tall rocks and great trees, until they are just across the aperture.

Everyone is cautious here. Mrs. Howard was particularly so. She drove so slowly down the

hill that the man she had called a tramp outwalked her. He reached the cut, looked, believed he saw an express train coming at full speed, and sat down by the roadside. He was not strong enough, nor was his head steady enough to risk crossing against time. He sat and waited, and looking up the drive, saw the pretty picture he had just seen altered to a terrible one.

The shriek of the coming train was a fearful one—a warning note delectable in a region where old residents quietly drove their slow teams before rushing express trains every day, and where an accident to "our esteemed neighbour So-and-So" was one of the regular items of the newspaper in consequence.

But Mrs. Howard's horse bethought himself to be terribly alarmed at the sound, and with a plunge and a cry as alarming in itself as that uttered by the iron monster in the cut, the animal started off at full speed.

The man who watched him knew that he would reach the track just in time to drag the wagon before the engine. He saw the woman holding her child fast and clinging to the light rail which surrounded the rest.

She was paralysed with terror—powerless to do anything to save herself. Yes, there was the human being who had refused him aid less than an hour before; who had called him a tramp. There was the child who had thrown a stone at him. He had cursed them. His curse had been, "May you need help and get none!" and it had fallen already.

They needed help, and suddenly the demon in his soul fled from it. The angel of pity took its place, and he stood fit for Heaven. They needed help, and he would give it—what help he could. It might be of avail.

"Heaven grant it may!" he prayed; and he sprang forward.

He was in time. He seized the mad horse's bridle. He held it, feeling most sorely that he had not his usual strength.

"Jump while you can!" he shouted. "I cannot hold the creature long!"

Mrs. Howard obeyed. Her foot was light, her action swift, or she had not succeeded. As it was she tottered and fell as she touched the ground, and got to her feet giddy and faint, but holding her child's warm little hand safe in hers.

But where was the carriage, where was the horse, where was the man who had saved their lives—the man she would reward with full heaped hands as well as with thanks and blessings—the man she had turned hungry from her door, and who had repaid her ill-doing with such a deed as this—where was he? The whistle shrieked, the cars backed, slowed, stopped; passengers alighted; her husband was there. His arms were about her, his pale face was covered with tears, as he sobbed,—

"You are not hurt, darling! It is a miracle!" But still her eyes strained themselves to see that shabby figure, dusty and mud-stained, but such a hero to her now—only to say to him,—

"I know you are not a tramp. Forgive me. Let me help you; let me pay a little of my great debt to you."

She could never be happy in this world again unless this were given her. So she stood, her head on her husband's shoulder, waiting until he should come. But the others gathered, slowly, silently, toward one spot, where up from the cut came two men, bearing something between them.

"He is dead!" they said. "The horse threw him before the engine."

BUENOS AYRES seems to have the largest "rocking-stone" yet discovered. It is situated on the slope of the mountain of Tandil, in the southern part of the province, and measures 90 feet long by 18 feet broad, and is 24 feet high. Its bulk is 5,000 cubic feet, and it weighs at least twenty-five tons. Nevertheless, it is so beautifully poised that a single person can set it rocking. When the wind blows from the south-east, the stone, which is pyramidal in form, ways to and fro on its foundation like the branches of a tree.

PHOTOGRAPHY AS A ROYAL HOBBY.

ONE of the most striking articles in the November *Windsor Magazine* deals with "Photography as a Royal Hobby." It is illustrated with excellent specimens of snapshots taken by the various members of our Royal Family. "The Princesses of Wales is a photographer of more than ordinary ability; she and her daughters keep their kodaks busily employed on every possible occasion; and were the Royal portfolio of views and photos to be thrown open to public view, the biographical work of our future historians and writers would be substantially assisted, and, one ventures to think, uniquely benefited. At the time of Prince Charles of Denmark's visit to England before his marriage, Princess Maud's camera was kept continually busy. Often the Royal lovers might have been seen starting for a ramble in the Norfolk lanes and fields, their cameras along across their backs, and their trained eyes ever on the alert to detect a subject, be it pasture, peasant, or prince, on which their photographic zeal might be expended. At an exhibition of amateur photos held by the Eastman Kodak Company, some short time ago, in Regent-street, there were exhibited many excellent specimens of kodak pictures taken by the Princesses of Wales, the Duchess of York, Princess Henry of Battenberg, the Duchess of Fife, and Princess Charles of Denmark, besides an admirably executed set by Princess Victoria of Wales. Many distinguished Royalties have stood before the camera of the Princesses of Wales, who, it can easily be imagined, would have but little difficulty in securing a numerous *clientele*, while her winning, fascinating manner would immediately dispel all those traditional drawbacks associated with having one's photograph taken. Princess Victoria of Wales, besides manipulating her kodak on land, has, like H.R.H. Princess Henry of Battenberg, taken the little leather-covered black box to sea with her on some of her yachting trips. On her father's boat, Princess Victoria 'snapped' her sister very effectively, seated in a deck chair, while she has also taken several of the officers. Speaking of water pictures reminds me that the Princesses of Wales secured a fine impression of the harbour of her native place, Stockholm, with the small steamers plying here and there, and the masts and sails of the bigger merchant vessels clear in the background. Ships, indeed, appear to be popular subjects with our Royal amateur photographers. Princess Beatrice is said to have much pleased the Queen by her prowess in taking good pictures, and there is little doubt that her Royal Highness inherits much of the late Prince Consort's love for pictures and everything connected with art. Another Royal Princess who has become a successful photographer is the Duchess of Fife. Both in London and in Scotland, the eldest daughter of the Prince of Wales has manipulated her camera on the most varied subjects. The Duchess of York is a most enthusiastic amateur in the art of picture reproduction. In selecting her own subjects, in diligent study of point of view, in focusing—perhaps the most important point of all—and in releasing the shutter, Princess May has made herself quite proficient; and the Duke of York, who has himself 'pressed the button' on more than one occasion, is nearly as interested as his popular wife in the final results of expeditions with a hand camera. That the Royal picture-makers are not ashamed of their work is fairly evident from the fact that many of the snap-shots they have created figure in frames on the walls of Royal residences, where distinguished visitors may inspect and admire them. The Queen herself has a special bureau at Windsor in which repose Morocco-bound albums containing a whole series of snap-shots, the work of her daughters and grand-children. And all the Royalties whose photographs are reproduced here have a gold-embossed album, in which copies of their own and their relatives' snapshots are beautifully engraved. This little book is marked 'Royal Edition,' and was prepared exclusively for Royal patronage; such being the case, I refrain from describing it further."

WHY ENGLISHMEN CANNOT MAKE PIPES.

THERE is a most instructive article in the November *Windsor Magazine* on the making of a "Briar Pipe." In the course of the article, Mr. Waincott, of Fleet-street, one of the greatest authorities on the subject, says: "It is strange, and yet it is a fact, that the English workman is of no use in the manufacture of pipes. The most skilful artisans are either the Austrians or the French. The pipemakers are a very select, small body, and observe every precaution to prevent their trade being learned by outsiders. They will have no apprentices, and if I introduced any boys into my factory I should have to pay them the union minimum wage, which is two pounds a week. On the other hand, the workmen are clever, and they earn high wages." Speaking of the cost of a pipe, Mr. Waincott remarks: "When the blocks arrive over here they are at once sorted. Out of one gross of blocks I rarely ever get more than three or four pieces of wood good enough for the very finest class of pipes, about a dozen good briars for fine quality pipes, and perhaps as many as four dozen pieces of wood for the ordinary everyday pipe. The remaining seven dozen pieces of wood are thrown into the furnace, and I might mention, help considerably to generate the necessary steam power for the machinery. Thus fully 80 per cent. of the material I purchase is of no use whatever, and it is this extraordinary amount of waste that causes the briar pipe to be so expensive. The prevailing defect, I may mention by the way, is generally in the form of a crack in the wood. I used to sell these defective blocks of briar at a penny per piece, and have sent away as many as 40,000 condemned briars at a time, but now I burn them all. The briars were sent abroad, and the cracks and flaws stopped with putty or some other composition, and then steeped in a strong solution of permanganate of potash, which deeply coloured the wood and made the defect invisible except on close inspection. All those briars you see of a very deep colour have passed through the permanganate of potash bath, and you may rest assured that there is a defect somewhere—they would not be that colour if it were not so, because natural briar is of a medium light hue. As to the average life of a briar pipe, you may take it for granted that a pipe will last you as many years as it costs you shillings. That is to say, if you pay six shillings for a pipe, if you are a moderate smoker it will last you six years. The style of briar pipe that is mostly in demand is that with a bowl cut the straight way of the grain. This, I may tell you, is not the most reliable kind of pipe, as the sudden expansion by the heat, and contraction of the wood when you stop smoking, causes it to split in a short time. The best pattern of briar is that with a bowl the grain of which is very mottled in appearance, or, as we call it, a 'bird's-eye grain.' This will never split."

BESIDES the Maria Theresas, seventeen hundred and eighty dollars, the people of Abyssinia, for small change, use a bar of hard, crystallized salt, about ten inches long, and two inches and a-half broad and thick, slightly tapering towards the end, five of which go to the dollar at the capital. People are very particular about the standard fineness of the currency. If it does not ring like metal, or if it is at all clipped, nothing will induce them to take it. Then, it is a token of affection among the natives, when friends meet, to give each other a lick of their respective amolls, and in this way the material value of the bar is also decreased. For still smaller change cartridges are used, of which three go to one salt. It does not matter what sort they are. Some sharpshooters use their cartridges in the ordinary way, and then put in some dust and a dummy bullet to make up the difference, or else they take out the powder and put the bullet in again, so that possibly in the next action the unhappy soldier will find that he has only mis-fires in his belt; but this is such a common fraud that no one takes any notice of it, and a bad cartridge seems to serve as readily as a good one.

CLIFFE COURT.

CHAPTER V.

THE morning sunshine was coming in a flood of radiance through the square-paned windows of Lady Carlyon's sitting-room, glinting on pictures and vases and flowers, and making Arline Lester's head look like that of an aureoled saint; for those wonderfully-tinted curls of hair, that seemed chestnut in the shadow, became bright gold when the light played amongst them.

She was sitting at the table, with a pencil and note-book in her hand, and opposite Lady Carlyon, whose pale face and heavy eyes betokened a sleepless night.

"Would you imagine it possible! I have been here three weeks!" she exclaimed, suddenly.

"Have you, indeed? Time passes very quickly—or, perhaps, it is your presence that has made me fancy so."

"You put it very prettily," Arline said, smiling, and coming over to the couch to sit by her side. "I have been very happy with you, but I must really see about leaving soon."

"Why shouldn't you? I wish you would stay with me always."

Arline shook her head—this was impossible; for her proud spirit would never have submitted to a life of dependence while she had health and strength to work.

"I want to find something to do soon, but it seems rather difficult."

"I was speaking to Hubert Cliffe about you last night, and asking him if he knew of anything that would suit you."

"Well—and did he offer any suggestion?"

"None—except—Alicia smiled—"that you should go to Cliffe Court as housekeeper."

"Did he mean it—seriously?"

"I don't know, but I should think not; you would surely not undertake such a post!"

"Why shouldn't I? One situation is as good as another, provided it is respectable," said Arline, stoutly; "and I have a decided domestic talent, so I've been told. What has become of their former housekeeper?"

"She is ill, and can't get about. Certainly, she is a very nice person, and superior to her position, being the widow of our old village doctor, who died very poor. Lord Cliffe invariably treats her with the greatest possible respect."

"As he would treat me if I went there," laughed the young girl. "Joking apart, Alicia, I don't think I could do better than apply for the vacant post—I should infinitely prefer it to governessing."

Lady Carlyon meditated for a few minutes. Brought up in the conventionalities of society, it seemed to her that Arline would incur the risk of losing caste by taking upon herself the duties of a sort of upper servant; but the girl was old enough to judge for herself, and she had no one else's feelings to consult.

"You must do as you think best, Lina," she said, at last; "I have no doubt you would find Cliffe a very comfortable home, and you would have nothing to do save give orders, and see they were obeyed."

"And you think Lord Cliffe would give me the situation?"

"There is not much fear but that he would if I asked him, and said you were a friend of mine."

"But that is just what I don't wish you to do!" exclaimed Arline, eagerly. "I want to go entirely on my own merits—such as they are—and to exact only as much consideration as if I had been brought up with no other expectation than that of fulfilling my present capacity—do you understand?"

"I think I do, you very independent little person."

"And I am right, am I not?"

"Perhaps so—indeed, I think I may say you certainly are."

"I am glad you agree with me," Arline said, kissing her, "for independent as you call me, I am only a weak woman after all, and I like other

people's opinions to coincide with my own. You see the case just resolves itself into this—I have to gain my own living, and there might be something incongruous in Lady Carlyon's friend in such a position as housekeeper at Cliffe, so if you simply introduce me as a person you know, and can recommend, it will be quite sufficient, and much better than saying we are old school fellows."

"Hubert Cliffe knows it already."

"But his uncle does not?"

"No—it is not probable he has heard anything at all about you."

"All the better. Shall I write to him, or seek a personal interview?"

"I will write for you, if you like, and manage it all, but I expect they will want you to go pretty soon, as Mrs. Belton is unable to attend to anything; and the fact of Lady De Roubais being there makes it more important that the *ménage* shall go on smoothly."

"Who is Lady De Roubais?"

"Lord Cliffe's niece—his only sister's child."

"She does not live there always?"

"No, but from a few words she said last night I fancy she has no intention of leaving yet awhile. She is very beautiful, but I can't say I exactly like her. She looks haughty and imperious—the sort of woman who would let no scruple stand in the way of any purpose she might desire to accomplish."

"She won't trespass on my domain, or I on hers," said Arline gaily; "so I suppose we shall have no opportunity of falling out, and I must curb my naturally impetuous temper, and become very amiable and submissive to the powers that be. I wonder if I shall find the task a hard one!"

Lady Carlyon took Arline's pretty fingers in hers, and said rather sadly,—

"It does not seem right that you should be debarred the pleasures and gaiety that girls of your age naturally expect. Your life ought to be so bright and happy."

"And so it will be!" Arline responded, quickly; "and any regrets I may once have had I have conquered, and I accept my lot with perfect content. I have made up my mind to be a model old maid, and show the world one does not require to be married in order to be happy."

Alicia shook her head.

"All very fine talking, Arline; but what of the love that comes to every woman some time or other?"

"Does it come, or does the only fancy it?"

"It is not always fancy—tenter perhaps, if it were."

"Well, so far I have been free, and I must guard against all possibilities—but my ears against the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. I suppose its people's own fault when they fall in love."

"Could it be blind?"

"Yes—willfully, sometimes, but I shall keep my eyes open, and so walk in safety."

"I wonder if in twelve months you will tell the same story," said Lady Carlyon, smiling, and then she went to her desk and wrote off the letter to Lord Cliffe, in which she said just as much concerning her *protégée* as she felt the circumstances required.

A reply soon arrived, containing the Viscount's best thanks for her coming to his assistance in their present domestic emergency, and requesting that Miss Lester should lose no time in entering on her duties as Mrs. Belton's substitute.

So the very next day Arline said "good-bye" to the Chase, and was driven through the sunshine up the grand chestnut avenue to Cliffe Court, and when she arrived taken direct to Mrs. Belton's room, where she found that lady in bed, and rather disposed to look with eyes of suspicion on her would-be helper.

"You are so very young!" she observed, disinterestedly, and scanning Arline from the crown of her sun-kissed hair to her little neatly shod feet.

"Not so very young—nearly twenty, and, besides, I have been used to domestic duties all my life."

"Well," said Mrs. Belton, with a sigh, "this is no time to pick and choose, and one must put up with what one can get. But, mind you, Miss Lester—very sharply—"although I am in bed, and not able to see to things myself, I'm not going to give up my authority. I shall tell you what to do, and you must do it."

"Certainly," answered Arline, good temperedly.

"After all, you won't have so much to look after, for the servants are very good"—when Mrs. Belton was well the servants were the worst that ever lived, and gave her more trouble than all the rest in Christendom put together—"and if they are only managed properly things work as smoothly as machinery. No doubt though," disconsolately, "they won't care to be ordered about by a young child like you."

"I must tell them I don't act altogether on my own responsibility, but on yours."

"Hum!" muttered the housekeeper, hardly knowing whether to be pleased at this apparent submission, or to look upon it as a piece of artfulness on the part of a minx who was desirous of stepping into her own shoes, and tried to disguise her designs under a cloak of sweet humility.

CHAPTER VI.

ARLINE was very much in earnest over her new duties, and, to tell the truth, rather disappointed that they proved so light. She had really very little to do; the staff of servants had been kept in excellent order, and the general management so well regulated that it went, as Mrs. Belton said, like machinery.

Lord Cliffe was a bit of an autocrat in his own house, and the slightest deviation from the established rules met with so stern a reprimand that few of the servants dared to risk a second from his lips. As a consequence, the young girl found that, in effect, her whole work consisted in transmitting Mrs. Belton's orders, for though the latter had given up her bunch of keys, she was by no means willing to relinquish one atom of her power.

Arline had a pretty little sitting-room to herself, where her meals were brought by a maid whose work it was to attend to her, and of course she was at liberty to go about the grounds as much and as often as she liked.

For some time after her arrival she saw nothing of Hubert, who had gone to London on business for his uncle, but sometimes in an evening she would peep through the banisters to catch a glimpse of Lady de Roubaix, as she swept into the dining-room in her silks and laces, with jewels flashing about her, looking like that dark queen "brow-bound with burning gold," whose beauty took the world by storm over a thousand years ago! Arline was something of an artist, and had a sincere admiration for the beautiful in whatever shape it appeared; and it seemed to her impossible to imagine anything lovelier than this splendid young Countess, whose life was, apparently, one long, luxurious holiday.

More than anything else she enjoyed her walks, the long, lonely rambles she took in the open country, either through the woods, or down to the seashore. One afternoon she went out rather earlier than usual, having scrupulously fulfilled the tasks set her by Mrs. Belton, and feeling a delightful sense of liberty as she took her way through the park where the bracken had grown as high as her own head, and the deer were heding together under the branches of trees that had been planted hundreds of years ago, when merry England was yet swayed by the dominion of the knightly Plantagenets.

It was a lovely afternoon, too warm if anything, with a lavish bounty of golden sunshine in the air playing on the leaves, and dappling the path with little tremulous shadows, as it pierced the thickly-woven canopy of the chestnut avenue. After leaving the park, Arline went straight on through fields where the corn stood up in emerald green walls on each side of the path, and as you looked through it a wonderful blaze of poppy scarlet met your eye—it was so pretty, too, when a faint breeze swept by, and ruffled the spear-

pointed leaves, and sent tiny waves of silver shadow rippling across.

The sky was one grand expanse of deepest, clearest azure, and on high a lark soaring in the blue air seemed to be pouring out his very heart in a song of keenest ecstasy. The green earth, in her splendid summer robe of leaf and blossom, was at her fairest, and her influences woke answering chords in the heart of the young girl, who seemed to be the only living creature near.

"One can but be happy when one is young, and the world is so beautiful," Arline murmured to herself, as she found her way into an unfrequented path through a wood that formed part of the Cliffe preserves. It was lonely enough now, filled with a subdued green light, and with no other sign of life than the lazy twitter of a bird, or the startled rush of a rabbit across her path into the thick undergrowth; but in a few months' time it would be echoing with the reports of guns, and the voices of sportsmen and keepers, for both Lord Cliffe and his nephew were ardent lovers of sport, and most careful in the preservation of game.

Arline had never been here before, but the novelty of exploring a fresh place constituted one of its greatest charms, and she kept on until she was stopped by a brook, or rather a river, for it was too wide to come within the province of the former. It seemed to run from one side of the wood to the other, and as far as she could see, possessed no more convenient method of crossing than was afforded by some stepping stones, just above a minute weir, where the water dashed and added round the boulders, and threw up little clouds of foamy spray, that looked wonderfully pretty in the dim, green light.

The young girl glanced round to make certain no one was in sight, and having quite reassured herself on this point, and come to the conclusion that she was safe, except for the bright black eyes of the squirrel curiously watching her from the branches, she proceeded to take off her shoes and stockings, and then, gathering her dress well up round her slim ankles, began stepping across the stones. She had nearly reached the middle of the stream, a feat only to be accomplished by springing—for the stones were set pretty wide apart—when one of them, which must have been unequally poised, gave way, and it was only by her alertness that she contrived to leap on to the next, instead of taking an impromptu bath. In doing so, she either strained or sprained her ankle, and also let fall one of her shoes, which was immediately carried down over the weir; and then, to make matters worse, she found that part of the stones had become submerged, and she was therefore in the middle of the river without means of getting on farther or for retreating—for the distance from the stone on which she stood to either of those on the side was too great for her to attempt.

Here was a dilemma, and one that threatened to be somewhat difficult to escape from. She had no stick to aid her, and the fact of her utter isolation, on which only a few minutes ago she had been congratulating herself, now seemed a matter for very serious regret.

She looked round helplessly; the squirrel was still watching her, a few birds were twittering out their lazy satisfaction in the delight of summer; but the slumbersome silence of the afternoon was otherwise undisturbed, and in this lonely spot it was very unlikely anyone would come to her assistance.

At any rate, she must try to make herself heard, so without much hope of success, she called out as loudly as she was able.

There was no reply, and after a short interval she repeated her cry, and to her pleasurable surprise it was answered by a man's voice, and, a few moments later, a young fellow of about six-and-twenty, with a fair, rapturist face and blue eyes, stood on the bank looking at her, in an astonishment that was rather amused.

"What's the matter?" he asked, wondering who she could be; and perfectly conscious of the pretty picture she made with her bare white feet and perplexed expression.

"Don't you see that I can't get across?" she exclaimed, half laughing, and quite free from the

embarrassments which, under other circumstances, she would certainly have felt.

"Which way do you want to go—this side or the other?" he asked, and Arline pointed to the bank she had just quitted, for an extension of her walk was now, of course, out of the question.

"All right, I'll see what can be done. Why on earth, if I may ask, did you choose such a method of crossing when there is a bridge a very little way farther down?"

"How did I know there was a bridge? You may be sure if I had been aware of it I should not have got myself in this fix;" this was said somewhat petulantly.

Mr. Hubert Cliffe seemed in no hurry to bestir himself—an adventure of this kind was far from disagreeable, and, besides, the girl looked so very pretty that he was inclined to prolong the pleasure of looking at her.

"You are a stranger here, then?" he said.

"Yes, I am, but I don't see that asking questions is the best way of helping me!" she replied, blushing a lovely rose-red under his gaze.

"Perhaps not, but I didn't know you had asked me to help you," he answered, mischievously. "Am I to understand such is the case?"

Arline knitted her delicate brows together in angry silence, and thought to herself that, in spite of his good looks, this must be a very disagreeable young man indeed.

"Silence gives consent, so I suppose you mean yes," he went on. "If you'll stay where you are—is not that a silly question, by the way, as it seems the reason you want me to help you is because you can't help yourself?"

"Very silly, indeed," this most emphatically.

"Well, I'll alter my sentence. If you'll be patient ten minutes, I'll be round by the bridge."

He was there in even less time, and sprang on the stone nearest to the one on which she stood.

"Give me your hands," he said, holding out his own, "and then jump. I'll see that you don't fall into the water."

"I can't jump!"

"Why not?"

"Because I have sprained my ankle."

"That alters the case entirely," he said, his smile changing to a more serious expression. "I must carry you over."

"Oh, no!" involuntarily.

"Well, I am entirely at your service, and if you can suggest any other method, I shall be only too delighted in helping you to put it into practice."

There was no other method, and Arline saw this at once, and regretted speaking as she had done, on the impulse of the moment; but for all that she was angry with her would-be rescuer; he seemed to treat the whole matter as a joke, whereas to her it was beginning to assume much more serious dimensions.

"I suppose, after all, it will have to be as you say," she murmured, disconsolately.

"Not unless you like, you know," put in Hubert, with an air of profound respect.

"I wish you would not tease me! It is very ungenerous, considering I am not in a position to resent it!" she exclaimed, childishly, while big tears, partly the result of the pain she was suffering, and partly that of reticence at his conduct, forced themselves from her eyes.

His manner changed instantly.

"I beg your pardon, I am very sorry, really sorry. Now, if you will get on the extreme edge of your stone, I will try to find a footing on it too, and I think I can get you over all right."

She did as he bade her, and it was an easy enough task for him to lift her slight, lithe figure in his arms, and spring across, very little impeded by her weight.

He was not a stoic, the gentleman who fills the responsible position of hero in this varnished history, and perhaps it is not to be wondered at that a little thrill of pleasurable emotion ran through his veins as he put down his light burden, rather regretting the passage had been such a short one.

"Thank you," she said, as she reached terra firma. "I need not trouble you any longer."



"DON'T YOU SEE THAT I CAN'T GET ACROSS?" SAID ARLINE, HALF LAUGHING.

"But your shoe, what have you done with it? You have only one."

"Oh, yes! I remember, it fell into the stream and went over the weir," she said, an expression of dismay stealing over her face.

"All right, I'll get it for you," he said, going away, and Arline took the opportunity of sitting down, and putting on her stockings and one shoe. Presently he returned with the other.

"I've fished it out with my stick. I suppose it is hardly a matter for surprise that it should be wet."

"I suppose not," she answered, regarding it ruefully. "But even if it were dry, I could not put it on, for my ankle is so swollen."

"And does it pain you?"

"Rather."

"Then I expect you won't be able to walk. Let me help you up, and you can try."

His surmise proved correct; she took a few steps, and then paused, unable to continue.

"Take my arm," he said peremptorily, drawing her hand through; "and tell me where you want to go, and I'll accompany you."

"But it's a long way off."

"All the more reason why you should not be permitted to struggle on alone."

"And probably you want to get home."

"I'll make my want subservient to yours. Have you any other objections to urge?"

"I don't like troubling you so much."

"Trouble does people good sometimes. I'll endeavour to learn a lesson by submitting to it with a good grace; but, first of all, you must tell me your home."

"Cliffe Court."

Hubert came to a sudden standstill and looked at her.

"Where?"

"Cliffe Court," repeated Arline, very much puzzled at the reception her news met with.

"You live there?"

"Certainly I do. Does it surprise you?"

"It does, rather."

"Perhaps," said the girl, beginning to laugh,

"you think I'm too insignificant a personage to belong to such a grand place, but I assure you it is a fact, nevertheless."

She was feeling quite at home with him now; her little rebuffs, and the way he took it, had given her a sort of superiority, which she contrived to maintain.

"You still look incredulous," she added.

"Do I? Well, I must confess that I am puzzled."

"Because you are wondering what position I occupy there?"

"Not so much that, as because I live there myself, and have never seen you," he answered.

It was Arline's turn to look surprised now.

"You—live—there—yourself?" she echoed, pausing between each word. "Then you must be Mr. Hubert Cliffe."

"That is my name; and you?"

"I am the new housekeeper, Arline Lester."

"Lady Carillon's friend? Ah, I remember now; at first I was very much puzzled as to your identity."

They walked on through the cornfield in complete silence. Arline was very much taken aback at her discovery. She wondered whether she had been too free, not to say sharp, with Lord Cliffe's nephew, and whether in his own mind he was thinking her a young female who either did not know, or tried to ignore, her proper place.

Poor Arline! As a matter of fact, this situation of hers placed her in a false position, and, independent as she was, and often as she had declared there ought to be no distinction of class, she found the practice a very different thing from the theory, and was more than once tempted to turn back from the path she had chosen.

She grew roofer and roofer as she wondered what Hubert Cliffe thought of her, and lifting her eyes suddenly to see whether his face bore any indication of his feelings, found his gaze fixed on her with an intensity that bore unmistakable evidence of the fact of his being extremely interested, if nothing else.

"Don't you think you had better leave me now?" she said, rather confusedly.

"Why should I leave you?"

"Because we are getting within view of the Court windows."

Hubert glanced up carelessly.

"I don't think there is any necessity for my leaving you, but if you don't wish to be seen I can take you through the shrubbery, and let you into the house by my study window. I think that will be the better plan."

It was the one they adopted, and by its means Arline got indoors without being spied by inquisitive eyes, whose owners might not, perhaps, have looked with equanimity on the spectacle of Lord Cliffe's housekeeper leaning on the arm of Lord Cliffe's heir.

(To be continued.)

THIS STORY COMMENCED IN NO. 1906. BACK NUMBERS CAN STILL BE HAD.

A SCIENTIST recently made some experiments on Lake Geneva to demonstrate the power of sound to travel a long way in water. A clock was made to strike under the water, and was heard to a distance of 12 miles. In a second experiment the striking of a clock was heard to a distance of 27 miles.

The Bluejackets and Coastguards' Gazette (J. N. Masters (Ltd.), Rye, Sussex), now in its sixteenth year, is, judging by the number before us, in the full enjoyment of vigorous youth. A timely article on "Canteens" indicates that there is a screw loose somewhere in the management that calls for early attention; while a serial story by the well-known writer on naval affairs, Mr. F. T. Jane, a short story, and notes and articles on current naval events, make up a capital bill of fare. Those having friends in the Navy would do well to send them *The Bluejacket* every month, or else call their attention to so useful a publication.



"YOU WANT ME TO COME WITH YOU, VERY WELL!" ACQUIESCED SIBEL, TURNING BACK.

YOUNG AND SO FAIR.

—10—

CHAPTER XXV.

A VISIT FROM THE EARL.

"We came from Lord Wentworth!" said Sibel, her cheeks flushing with anger, although pity filled her heart at the sight of the misery in his face.

"And the boy brought you, I understand!" said Major Lushington, his eyes flashing resentfully, in spite of the tears which still hung on his lashes.

"Certainly I brought her," and Hugh drew himself up; "and I'll take Miss Fitzgerald wherever she likes to go."

"No doubt you will!" passing his hand over his forehead, as if to collect his thoughts. Then he went down the steps, and laid his hand on May Queen's mane. "You will think no end of evil, because I came back to see a woman die."

"I know nothing about it," very gravely. "Lord Wentworth told us to ask if there was anything he could do. If—If Mrs. Springfield could be moved, he would like her to come to the Chestnuts, and be properly nursed."

"Thanks! It was good of him—very good," his voice as harsh as a raven's; "but she'll soon be out of the way of pity or charity. She's dying!"

And without another word he walked away, waved his hand to Sibel, gave a last glance at that shrouded window, got into the fly, and drove off.

Sibel rode on, and waited in the road, whilst Hugh spoke to Mrs. Crawshaw. The poor lady had been unconscious most of the night, and when awake was always moaning with pain.

The doctors had done all they could; a nurse had been hired, and no expense was to be spared; the gentleman who had just left had gone to fetch her husband, who had not come as was expected.

Hugh gave her a small basket of grapes, and having ascertained that there was nothing to be done, and that nobody could be of any assistance, was turning away when Sibel rode up, with tears on her cheeks. "Ask if I can be of any comfort or use!"

"No, miss, thank you," said Mrs. Crawshaw, who had overheard the request. "She wouldn't know if you were in the room or not. She was moaning that terrible when the gentleman came; but she's quiet now, and seems as though she would pass away in her sleep."

"Poor thing! It's very sad," and, with a slight bend of her head, Sibel turned away.

Hugh looked at her anxiously, as he rode by her side, but did not say a word. In his own mind, and to his complete satisfaction, he was cursing the Major as a double-dyed scoundrel, but he would have very much liked to know what impression the whole affair had made on his companion.

She looked grave and sad, but not so utterly crushed and upset as might have been expected, after finding that her lover had deceived her. A small hope crept into his heart that she would be absolutely glad to find out that he was unworthy of her. And, if so, surely here was proof enough for anything! If there had been nothing to be ashamed of in the whole transaction, surely the Major would have made a clean breast of it! If a friend of his met with an accident in the hunting-field, it was quite natural that he should inquire after her the next morning; but why do it in secret, and pretend that he had gone up to town!

These questions occupied his mind till they were near home, when Sibel turned her left ear in his direction, and made a remark about the early crops, as a hint that the farm and all concerning it were to be left out of the conversation.

When they reached the Chestnuts, she halted at the foot of the stairs with the folds of her riding-habit gathered up in her hands.

"Must we tell him!" looking up anxiously into Hugh's face.

"I think we ought."

"Then tell him yourself after luncheon; but don't be too hard on Major Lushington."

"I shall say that we found him at Crawshaw's farm, and that will be quite sufficient," with a significant glance.

"He looked so utterly miserable."

"I dare say he did!" gruffly.

"Hugh, you mustn't hate him, for my sake," in a soft whisper.

"And that is the only reason why I detest him! Send him about his business, and I'll swear he's the best man alive!"

She shook her head, and went slowly upstairs. Hugh flung his riding-stick on the hall-table, and followed, with a frown at the perversity of woman. She sighs and frets because a door is shut, and when it is opened, afraid to go through!

After luncheon Sibel retired to her own sitting-room, and Hugh gave Lord Wentworth a detailed account of their morning's adventure. The Viscount was much concerned, and asked if Lushington had given no explanation.

"Not a word. He seemed desperately angry at being found out, and in a great hurry to be off. Mrs. Crawshaw told me he had gone after Mr. Springfield."

"That looks well!" with an air of relief. "The husband is the only man who ought to be there."

"I believe they telegraphed for him yesterday."

"And he hasn't come! Perhaps he is not in England!"

"No, perhaps not; but, uncle, don't you think that this is quite enough excuse for breaking off an engagement!" with intense eagerness.

"Hardly, because a man goes to see a dying friend. He may have known her since she was a child, and it would have been inhuman to go away and leave her to die alone."

"But the mystery! There must be something wrong."

"I think Lushington ought to be called upon

to explain his conduct," said Lord Wentworth, thoughtfully. "It is not fair to condemn him till he has had a chance of defending himself."

"I don't see that he will have a leg to stand upon."

"My dear boy, I never knew you so severe before. By the time you have come to my age you will have had many follies to be ashamed of, which, to other people's eyes, may seem like vices."

"You haven't got any, I'm sure."

"Then you are surer than I am!" with a grave smile. "Dadley is a better man than his father ever was; but I don't know another like him!"

"And what do you think of me?" smiling, although he was half in earnest.

Lord Wentworth looked at the boy's face, beautiful as any that was ever traced on canvas, and sighed,—

"You will never do anything by halves, Hugh; you will either be very bad or very good. In Heaven's mercy I hope it will be the last!" his voice sinking in evident emotion.

"If I don't turn out as I ought, uncle, it won't be your fault," his eyes shining with hope.

On the threshold of his manhood it seemed to him this day as if the future held a new promise of joy; and the clouds of foreboding rolled away.

Finding that Sibel did not wish for any more exercise, he went out for a walk by himself. During his absence Lord Wentworth had a long talk with her, and it was agreed that after a few days had passed she should write to Major Lushington, and ask for an explanation.

She did not like to do it, but felt obliged to bend to his superior knowledge of the world, and also to follow his advice when he was kind enough to take the trouble to give it.

There was a loud ring at the front door, as she sat down to pour out the tea, and her heart gave a throb, as she thought it might be Major Lushington come back to tell her everything. She looked up with expectant eyes as Manser opened the door, shut it behind him, and came noiselessly across the carpet with a card on the silver waiter.

"Please, miss, Lord Windsor is in the drawing-room, and wants to speak to you very particularly."

"It must be some mistake," said Lord Wentworth. "Show him in here."

"Begging your pardon, my lord, the Earl said he wished to see Miss Fitzgerald in private."

"Very strange! You must go to him, my dear; but send for me, if you want me."

"Thank you very much; but you haven't had your tea."

"Manser shall pour me out a cup."

She went reluctantly, wondering what Lord Windsor could have to say to her.

As she opened the drawing-room door he was standing on the tiger-skin mat, studying his own countenance in the glass. On seeing her figure reflected in it he turned round quickly and came to meet her, with outstretched hand. She put hers into it, and said,—

"How d'ye do, you wanted to see me!"

"Pon my word, I'm ashamed to show myself," looking down at his riding gaiters and boots, which were splashed with mud. "Rode in such a state; and couldn't wait to make myself look decent."

"It doesn't matter. I hope Lady Windsor isn't ill. Won't you sit down?" pointing to some comfortable armchair, whilst she subsided into another.

"Perfectly well, thank you," standing in front of her, evidently in some embarrassment. "Fact is, I've come to ask you to do a deuced queer thing—I mean something out of the common."

"What is it?" her eyes opening wide, as she lost herself in conjectures as to what it could possibly be.

"Heard of the accident? Frightful catastrophe—woman nearly killed—taken to Crawshaw's Farm, more dead than alive."

"I heard of it," with a shiver; "but what can I do for her?"

"That's the rub. Will you do it?" striking the tip of his boot with his riding-stick. "It isn't everyone I would ask; with a slow smile, as he thought of their flirtation; "but I thought you might. You see, she'll be dead in an hour or two; so it can't do you much harm."

"What do you mean?" getting up from her chair, and looking quite frightened.

"She wants to see you. 'Pon my word' I don't know why; but she's got it in her head that she can't die happy unless she does."

"But she doesn't know me. She has never seen me!" in great bewilderment.

"It's a riddle to me. Couldn't make it out; but she's dead set on it. Really I wouldn't have asked you if I could have helped it."

"Do you think I ought to go?" looking up into his face.

"I do," he said, frankly.

"Then come to Lord Wentworth; let us see what he says!"

She led the way into the library and he followed; greetings were exchanged, and the object of the Earl's visit explained.

"I do not understand it," said Lord Wentworth, gravely. "There must be something behind the scenes, and I cannot tell if I ought to let Miss Fitzgerald go."

"I will take the greatest care of her."

"I don't doubt it, supposing she were left in your charge, which is quite impossible. Mrs. Springfield has never seen her, and I don't imagine she has ever heard her name."

"Seemed as if she had, 'pon my word. You wouldn't believe how she begged and implored me to come and fetch her."

"Then you were with her too?" with a slightly ironical smile.

Lord Windsor examined a patch of mud on the toe of his boot. "Yes! we were very old friends."

"And Lushington too?"

That piece of mud seemed quite engrossing, and detained him half a minute before he answered,—

"Don't know about Lushington."

"He won't be there this afternoon?"

"No! she is quite alone. Her husband's a brute, and has never turned up."

"And the poor lady is really at the point of death?"

"Can't last any time!"

"Sibel, it is for you to decide," turning to her as she leaned against the back of a chair.

She clasped her hands together and drew a deep breath.

"I must go if she is dying."

"Then I will go with you," stretching out his hand and ringing the bell.

"Oh, no, indeed, you mustn't."

"I'll promise to bring her back in less than an hour," said Lord Windsor, earnestly, "and I'll take the greatest care of her!"

"You are very good," with a courteous bow; "but Miss Fitzgerald is kind enough to live with me as a daughter, and I should be wanting in a father's duty if I let her go to such a scene without me. Tell them to get the brougham ready as quickly as possible," to Manser, "and send London to me."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DEATH-BED.

THE sun had gone down before the farm was reached, and the house looked dark and gloomy in the shadow of the trees. The front door was open as it had been in the morning, and the blind was still flapping against the box of crocuses in the upper window. That was the only sound that broke the stillness, and a spell of silence seemed to have fallen upon all the live-stock about the place.

Lord Windsor sprang from his horse and came to the door of the brougham. As he helped Sibel on to the steps he noticed that her hand was shaking. He looked kindly down into her troubled face, and assured her that there was nothing to be frightened at.

"No use in making a noise with the knocker,"

he said to Lord Wentworth. "I will go first, and lead the way."

"Certainly, as you know it."

Lord Windsor went up the stairs, and turning to the left, stopped before a door, which was slightly ajar.

"This is the room."

Sibel looked round at Lord Wentworth as if for support, and he drew her hand within his arm, as the Earl pushed open the door. The nurse came forward with her finger to her lips.

"One moment, my lord, a clergyman is with her. Could you wait till he's gone?"

Lord Windsor nodded, and Mrs. Crawshaw, bustling up the stairs with a candle in her hand, and bowing to her distinguished visitors, opened the door of another room on the opposite side of the landing, and requested them to walk in.

It was a bed-room, neatly but plainly furnished, with an old-fashioned press in one corner, with large brass handles, which glistened in the light of the candle.

Mrs. Crawshaw, a homely-looking woman, with grayish hair, fastened with a pair of combs in two large curls on either side of her face, drew forward a small chair for Sibel, a large one, something like a sedan chair, minus the door, for Lord Wentworth, and a three-legged stool for the Earl.

She lighted two candles in massive brass candlesticks, and set them on the chest of drawers in the window, then asked if they wouldn't take a cup of tea or a glass of wine by way of refreshment.

The offer was declined, and she went away, excusing herself on the plea of having to see after her husband's supper by the time he came back from town.

Lord Windsor got up from his stool, and sat under towards the old four-poster, which occupied nearly the whole side of the room beyond the door. Looking up to see what had attracted his attention, Sibel saw that a riding-habit and hat were laid upon the white counterpane.

Evidently they were what Mrs. Springfield had worn only the day before, and Sibel shivered as she looked at them. The hat was entirely crushed out of shape, the skirt of the habit torn from the waist to the hem, even the remnant of the small dog-skin glove was there, which had to be cut to pieces before they could get it off her swollen hand, all testifying pathetically to their owner's misfortune.

On the floor there was a letter, yellow with age, which had probably fallen from the pocket, containing perhaps the secret of her life, and evidently cherished for years; it was lying on the carpet, at the mercy of the first stranger who should care to touch it.

Obedying a sudden impulse, she got up from her chair, and stooped to pick it up. As soon as she had got it in her hand, she recognised the writing on the envelope, and wished she had left it alone. Lord Windsor quietly took it from her, and held it to the flame of the candle.

"Burnt letters tell no tales!" he said, as if to himself.

She gave a little bow of assent, and sat down again, listening to the low murmur of prayer in that other room. Presently there was a movement, steps on the landing and down the stairs, and the nurse looked in, and said,—

"If you will come at once!"

Lord Windsor looked round at the other, and was the first to go into the sick room. Sibel followed, tremblingly clinging to Lord Wentworth's arm, scarcely daring to raise her eyes, for fear of seeing some shocking sight.

"I have brought Miss Fitzgerald!" said the Earl.

The sound of his voice reassured her, and taking courage, she looked up. Straight before her, in bed, but supported by many pillows, she saw one of the loveliest women in England; delicate features, pale with pain and exhaustion, light brows meeting over a pair of light-brown eyes, brilliant with the fatal lustre of fever, and a cloud of yellow hair tossed over the iron railing at the head of the bed.

There was nothing to cause a shudder—the gash on the white forehead was hidden by golden

curl, the crushed arm was concealed by a soft woollen shawl of palest blue.

Sibel's heart swelled with infinite pity—so young, so fair, and yet she must die. Surely if a man had ever known and loved her, he could never have left her to die like this!

The brilliant eyes fixed themselves upon her. She saw the pale lips move, but could not understand what they said. Lord Windsor seemed to know, and beckoned to her. She drew her hand from Lord Wentworth's arm, and went up to the side of the bed, feeling no fear now, although the shadow of the angel of death seemed to hover on the threshold of the room.

Mrs. Springfield fixed a piercing glance on the innocent girlish face turned so kindly towards her own.

"Pretty enough," she murmured, and panted for breath.

It was pitiful to see her poor chest heaving; and Sibel, stranger as she was, felt the tears come into her eyes and roll down her cheeks.

"You needn't cry," she said, slowly; "I've hated my life, I'm glad to go. Do you feel as if you would like to die to-night?" her voice sinking.

"No, not quite just yet," tremulously, feeling ashamed of an involuntary clinging to earth, and shrinking back from those kindling eyes, which seemed to flame like a torch.

"But you will," hoarsely, for her strength was nearly exhausted. "You will long for it as I do if you love him. Listen," raising her head with a desperate effort of will, and clutching the sleeve of Sibel's coat with her small white hand. For a long minute she fought with her falling breath, determined not to die till she had fulfilled her vow. When the struggle was over, the dew of death were already on her smooth, white brow, but her eyes were still fixed on Sibel's with their haunting stare.

"I wanted to warn you"—a gasping sigh—"Harold Lushington was my— Oh, Heaven, you can't touch me!" she broke off, as Sibel was listening intently. With a scream of horror, the wife's golden head sank back on the pillow, and the sentences she had longed to finish was cut short for ever, as her husband appeared in the doorway.

James Springfield, a dark-browed man, with a coarse, sensual mouth, driven to his wife's bedside against his will, arrived in time to scare her life away, with her last message on her lips.

Sibel saw Lord Windsor stretch out his hand and lay it reverently across the glazing eyes; she heard the husband's heavy step behind her, as he came up to the side of the bed; and then as the truth flashed across her mind that death had come, and was no longer only a dreaded shadow, the sound of rushing waters came into her ears; and, overcome by horror and many conflicting emotions, she would have fallen across the bed if the Earl had not caught her in his arms.

With a stern, pale face he carried her out of the room, and straight downstairs, never stopping till he had placed her in the brougham.

"Thank you," said Lord Wentworth, gravely. "She will be all right now."

"I am sorry I ever brought her!" said the young man, full of compunction.

"You did your duty. Good-evening. Home as fast as you can," to the footman.

"Ay, take her away!" muttered Lord Windsor, as he looked after the fast receding carriage. "She's too good for any of us; but I mean to have her."

He lingered on the steps, not liking to go back into the house, but feeling that he might be expected to wait for a few words with Mr. Springfield.

There was not a cloud on the sky, and the evening star gleamed from an opal-coloured heaven between the silvery spires of two poplar trees in the hedge. The Earl was not much given to reflection, but the scene he had just been through, with its lesson of pain and regret, had roused him for a short time out of the fatal lethargy into which he had fallen, regarding all things not mortal and transitory; and, with a mental start, he suddenly remembered that

sooner or later Death would come to his own door, and he would have to let him in.

He lighted a cigar to cheer himself up, and presently the bulky figure of Mr. Springfield came through the darkness of the hall, and joined him on the step.

"Sad business!" he said, laconically, after he had asked for a light, and puffed for some time at an enormous cheroot.

"Very!" replied the Earl, looking steadily at the tip of his cigar. "Pity you weren't in time."

"She seemed deuced pleased to see me! It was that fool Lushington that made me come. Wish to Heaven he'd mind his own business!"

Lord Windsor smoked on in disgusted silence.

"Have you any idea where she had better be buried? Her own people haven't had anything to say to her for a long while. Don't think there's much good in taking her down to Cornwall."

"Any reason against Thornfield?"

"No. I think it would do very well," with an air of relief. "She can have any monument you know, that's thought proper. Don't mind the expense, but hate all the bother and the fuss."

"I will follow—and Everard."

"Thanks; awfully good of you! Didn't want to do it all by myself. But I say, you are not going to leave me!" as the Earl threw away his cigar.

"Sorry, but I must. My mother will be waiting for me. Good-evening."

"Is there an inn or any place where I can get a bed? Can't stay here," with a shiver.

The Earl looked at him doubtfully. No, he could not ask him to the Court.

"You will find the 'Ball' pretty comfortable. Crawshaw will tell you where to find it. Good evening."

With a slight nod he walked round to the stables, and called to his groom. A minute later he rode out at the gate, and wondered, as he went on his homeward way, how Laura Delamere, in her maddest days, could have linked herself with a brute like that.

Like Lord Wentworth, he was anxious to get away as fast as he could, for the moral atmosphere of the place was thoroughly distasteful, and he never passed Crawshaw's Farm again without an inward shudder.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HE COULDN'T COME.

LAURA, the unhonoured wife of James Springfield, tallow merchant, of Mark Lane, London, was carried to her grave in Thornfield Churchyard. The sins and the sorrows of her unhappy life were buried with her beneath the sods; and though there were tears in the eyes of one or two, who remembered her beauty and had felt her charm, her husband's face was cold and impassive, and his eyelids dry. The Earl of Windsor and Captain Everard followed out of kindness of heart, but the man whom she had once loved better than any other was not there; and when the service was over, and the mourners hurried away, with as much haste as was compatible with decency, there was not a single flower to place on the uncarved-for grave. Mr. Springfield went up to London by the first train, leaving a groom behind to bring up the horses, and everything belonging to his late wife.

"So the chapter's ended," he said to himself, as he hailed a hansom, and drove down to the office. "Wonder if I shall ever begin another. She wasn't as bad as she might have been, but a deuce of a temper. Poor girl! I won't grudge her the best of marble."

But try as he would, he could not quite banish her image from his mind, as he added up his long columns of figures; a pair of light-brown eyes, which he had once thought the prettiest things on earth, kept looking up at him in wild reproach, and whenever he laid down his pen, he fancied he heard that last panic-stricken cry in his ears.

It was a pleasant greeting for a husband, tell-

ing of years of pain and fear and cowardly ill-usage, borne perhaps in silence and dogged resignation, till revealed at the moment of death.

"Oh, Heaven! you cannot touch me now! not now, when my feet are already standing on the shores of death, and my soul going back into the hands of God."

She was safe from him; no harsh words, no jeers or taunts could follow her to the land of silence. And he was left to find another victim, who would marry him for the sake of the gold which he squeezed out of his unscrupulous merchandise, and perchance have her sorrows paid for by a second monument of Parian marble over a forgotten grave!

It was an easy way of settling a long-standing debt, and the world would naturally take it as a substantial proof that whatever differences had separated the unhappy couple the fault could not lie with such a generous widower. James Springfield had an eye to the main chance in everything he did, and when he made an outlay, took care to get his full money's worth out of it. He contrived to get an elaborate description of his wife's monument into the columns of *Veracity*, and every pound that he had spent on the lovely angel holding a broken snowdrop in his hand redounded to his credit in the City.

"There must be some good in Springfield to go in for a thing like that," the stockbrokers said to their wives, as they talked the matter over after dinner, when the time had come for the post-prandial cigar, and that sense of comfort, a pair of warm slippers.

And the wives agreed that he must have been an excellent husband. So wags the world, where fools pay and rogues get the profit, and nothing succeeds so well as success.

Sibel wrote her letter to Major Lushington under Lord Wentworth's advice, and waited in great anxiety for the answer, for the postman came day after day and left no letter with thered and gold monogram.

Lord Wentworth said nothing, out of deference to Sibel's feelings, but there is reason to believe that he thought a great deal.

Hugh, on the contrary, said as much as he dared, and a great deal more than he ought. It seemed to him incredible that such conduct should be tolerated, and he suggested that his uncle should write to the Major, and tell him never to set foot in the Chestnuts again, or venture to address a single word to Miss Fitzgerald during the whole course of his life.

Half measures, according to him, never answered, and were sure to entail more harm than good. If Major Lushington had done nothing to be ashamed of he would have answered at once, and as he had not done so it was proof positive that he had not a word to say in his defence.

"Sibel, write to him, and tell him that you will never speak to him again!" he said, earnestly.

"My dear boy, how could I! You might have a little more respect for my feelings; and worried, angry, ashamed, and anxious, she gave a little sob.

Hugh's penitence was beyond all bounds. He called himself a brute, and every opprobrious epithet he could think of, implored her pardon, and having kissed her hand as if he would devour it, rushed out of the house, that she might be spared the sight of him for a few hours.

Smiling at his exaggerated remorse, and very glad to think he was safe out of the way, she went to the gardener, and begged for some white flowers and two pieces of wood.

Having obtained them, she shut herself up in her own sitting-room, and diligently set to work first to frame a cross out of the wood, and then to cover it with flowers and ferns.

When it was done she put it in a basket, and having dressed herself in her out-door things, stole softly down the stairs, with the basket on her arm.

Wilson had told her that the poor lady's grave had not a leaf or a flower to adorn it, and she had determined that it should not be left in such a state to proclaim the husband's neglect to the world.

Feeling uncertain as to what any of the house-

hold would think of the proceedings, she let herself out by the side-door without telling anyone of her intention, and proceeded at a brisk pace down the carriage-drive.

She felt shy of being seen for many reasons, but principally because she was afraid lest her motives might be mistaken. It would be so horrid if anyone imagined that she was doing it for Major Lushington's sake; and yet they might, some people were so very stupid.

It was a calm, still day, and scarcely a twig moved to break the intense silence of the churchyard.

The grey-stone building, half covered with ivy, stood at the upper end with the graves of the village and the near neighbourhood clustering round the feet of mother church like a flock round its pastor.

Most of them were marked with simple wooden crosses, symbols of poverty and faith, and on some there were wreaths of primroses laid by the hands of love.

Sibel made her way to a quiet corner, where the earth had been lately disturbed, placed her cross on the ill-shaped mound, and stood for a few moments wrapped in thought.

What was the history of the poor creature lying forgotten under the sod? Would she ever know whether it was darkened by sorrow or sin? Or was it a sphinx-like enigma, the answer to which was written in Heaven, but not to be guessed on earth?

"Harold Lushington was my—"
—lover, friend, or husband? The sentence ought never to have been begun, if never ended—the uncertainty was more cruel than anything. It could not be simple "friend," for the words were to convey a warning. If not friend, a lover, and then there was the possibility that he might have loved and lost her through no fault of his own, although the one whom he had loved could find no excuse.

Sibel was not like other girls in some things. Knowing her *fiance* to be a hardened flirt, accustomed to the indiscriminate flirtations that begin and end so readily in a garrison town, she had never flattered herself that she was his first and only love.

He was at least twelve or fourteen years older than herself, so that he might possibly have met this Laura Delamere when she herself was in the nursery. She could forgive his possible attachment if there was nothing worse—oh, Heaven! that she in her youth and innocence should already have to doubt. She knelt down, and breathed a prayer, feeling that Heaven was nearer in this quiet corner of God's acre, with no one, but the silent dead, waiting in unconscious patience for the end.

As she came out of the gate someone on a chestnut horse was riding by. Lord Windsor looked over his shoulder, meditating on that other day, when he formed a part of a scanty funeral train, and his eyes encountered the very girl whom he had been thinking of but a minute before. He pulled up with an exclamation of pleasure, took off his hat, jumped off his horse with unwonted alacrity, and held out his hand.

"It isn't Sunday!" with a puzzled air.
"No, why should it be?" not understanding his meaning, and wishing him miles away.

He was certainly not of the same opinion with regard to herself, for he was studying every feature of her face, as if he wanted to commit them to memory. "But there are no prayers," he objected.

"I haven't been to church!" with a slight smile.

"Ah, flowers I see!" taking a broken lily, which was lying at the bottom of the basket. "May I consecrate it?"

"Yes, if you have no superstition about it. It was meant for a grave!" she added, in a low voice.

"Ah, I wish I had thought of it!" with a glance into that far-off corner. "Pon my word, I quite forgot! Think I'll go and have a look."

"Then good afternoon!" preparing to walk on.

"No, if you go, I must! But, Miss Fitzgerald, looking rather confused, "It would be the greatest favour possible—would you mind?"

Sibel looked bewildered.

"You see I've never been in this sort of place before—except to church, and it isn't lively."

"You want me to come with you! Very well!" turning back up the path.

"Thanks, awfully!" murmured the Earl, as he placed himself at her side.

When they reached the grave he looked down on it in silence. After a while he stretched out his hand, and pointed to it with some emotion. "There are stories about her—they say she was fast, and had only men for her friends, but the women were jealous of her, that's the truth, and she was more aimed against than sinning."

"And Major Lushington!" speaking under a sudden impulse, and looking eagerly into his face.

A slight colour tinged his cheeks, and fixing his tiny pane of glass in his eye, he stooped down, as much as his collar would allow him, and examined the cross. "She was fond of him once—before she married Springfield; but I don't know the rights of it. Your flowers, Miss Fitzgerald! Wonder if you'd do the same for me!"

"Did he come to her funeral?" in a grave whisper.

"Who? Lushington! No, how could he! Didn't you know that he was smashed in a railway accident? By Jove, I've thrashed you out! Let me ride home, and get the carriage!"

"No, not for the world!" she said, faintly.

(To be continued.)

THIS STORY COMMENCED IN NO. 1000. BACK NUMBERS CAN STILL BE HAD.

ALL AMONG THE HEATHER.

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CHAPTER III.

GONE.

MRS. CURTIS observed that Elsie was more silent than usual after she had extracted from the good woman the little that was known about her origin.

But such silence was natural enough, for the girl had something of importance to think about, and she was, moreover, at an age when girls are apt to fall into reveries and to dream day-dreams, and the worthy housekeeper was herself so busy at this time that her own mind was more than usually occupied.

For the *Hermitage* was undergoing a much-needed amount of painting, scrubbing, and whitewashing, and everything was being done to make the old house look as much like home as possible to the long-absent master when he returned.

Nothing could make the old-fashioned furniture look new, and it was next to impossible for Elsie, with all her talent, to produce anything like an artistic effect in rooms whence cumbersome heavy chairs and tables and dingy, faded hangings could not be banished.

"I daresay he will refurbish the dear old house when he gets married," she thought, with a sigh. "For everything will change with her presence; and I am glad I am going away. I could not bear to have her cold eyes looking at me at every turn."

So thinking, she arranged flowers in the vases in the different rooms for the last time, and she took from her pocket a letter, which she placed on the dressing-table in Lionel's room, so that he might see it soon after he entered the house.

Two or three times this morning Elsie had looked into the kitchen, where Mrs. Curtis with another servant was busy cooking, as though they expected their master would return so hungry that he would be able to eat food enough for half-a-dozen men.

On the last occasion that the girl made her appearance there, she seemed to be seized by a sudden fit of affection for the woman who had been neither a nurse nor a mother to her, and yet had bestowed upon her the affection of both,

and she flung her arms round the housekeeper's neck and kissed her tenderly. Mrs. Curtis was surprised at this unusual demonstration, but she was likewise greatly exercised in mind at the moment about some little delicacy which she remembered her master used to like in the days gone by, so she returned the kiss absently, and without looking at Elsie's face, she said, with just a shade of impatience,—

"There, dear, there; I'm busy now. The master will be here this evening, and I'm not half ready for him."

The girl made no answer, but she lingered in the room as though she wished to say something.

Her face was turned away from the housekeeper, and Elsie tried once to speak; but she felt that her voice would betray her, and at last she left the room with her purpose in coming to it only half accomplished.

The shades of evening were closing in when a fly containing two gentlemen, and carrying a quantity of luggage, pulled up at the gate of the *Hermitage*, and as Lionel Denison alighted, he looked towards the house with an eager glance, as though he expected someone to be awaiting him.

In this he was not disappointed, for the sound of wheels stopping at the gate brought Curtis and his wife to the door, and the old couple were so agitated with the pleasure of seeing their young master once again that tears sprang into their eyes as they received him.

This was not all he looked for, however, and a question was upon his lips, but he kept it back, thinking, with a half smile,—

"She is nearly a grown-up woman now, and is waiting for me to come to the drawing-room."

So he turned the handle of the door, but the room was in darkness, and at this moment Mrs. Curtis hastened to say that dinner was ready to be served.

"But where is Elsie?" he asked, with something like displeasure in his voice. "Isn't she coming to speak to me?"

"Yes, where is Miss Elsie?" exclaimed Mrs. Curtis, looking about in amazement. "She's been counting the hours, dear child, until you could come. I suppose she's in her own room; but she must have heard you. I'll send up, sir; and now will you and the gentleman go to your rooms first, or will you have dinner at once?"

"We will have it in ten minutes," was the reply, and, punctual to the second, Lionel Denison and Harry Kingswood entered the dining-room.

The table had been originally laid for two, but Curtis had just placed a third knife and fork when his wife appeared with a troubled face, as she said,—

"I can't find Miss Elsie anywhere, sir. I've been in the room, and I've been in the garden, and she isn't nowhere about the place. I can't make it out, anyhow."

"Did she say anything about going anywhere?" asked Mr. Denison, anxiously.

"No, sir. She hadn't any place to go, for she doesn't know anybody about here; and now I come to think of it, I haven't seen her for some hours, I've been so busy."

"When did you last see her?" asked her master, gravely.

"Well, she came into the kitchen this afternoon and she kissed me, which wasn't a common thing for her to do in the middle of the day. But I'd so much to do I didn't give it a thought at the time, and now I remember I haven't seen her since."

"Who is Miss Elsie?" asked Mr. Kingswood, with the glance of a hungry man at the well-spread table.

"My adopted daughter," replied his friend, briefly.

Then, he turned to his housekeeper, and said,—

"We will have dinner, Mrs. Curtis. I daresay Elsie will return before we have finished."

But though they lingered over the meal the girl did not appear, and Lionel Denison grew still more anxious, while his housekeeper walked herself up into a perfect fever of misery.

At this juncture, the maid-of-all-work, who had been up to Mr. Denison's room to make it tidy for the night, came down with a note which had escaped her master's observation.

"It's like Miss Elsie's writing," she said, confidentially, and as Mrs. Curtis took it in her hand her own face became deadly pale, for she felt that it was the forerunner of great trouble.

There was no help for it, however; it must be given to her master, and, scarcely knowing what to fear, the poor old woman delivered the mysterious missive.

"She has gone away—she means never to come back again," said Lionel, as he read the tear-stained epistle; "but what can be the meaning of it? Hear what she says."

"My dear guardian," he read, "I have only recently heard from Miss Grey the manner in which you found me when I was a little child, and the breach between you and her, which it seems that I then unconsciously caused. What happened in the past I could not help, but as I am told that I am the only obstacle to your present happiness, I should be ungrateful indeed after all your kindness if I did not at once go away, and authorize you to promise the lady you have so long loved that I will never voluntarily enter your house again. For all you have done for me—a helpless, friendless child—I can only thank you; I am too powerless and too heart-broken to say more. Beg Mrs. Curtis always to think kindly of me, and believe me, yours deeply-grieved and sincerely grateful, ELISE."

That was all—no hint as to whether she was going nor with whom, and Lionel Denison sat for a moment speechless.

"How very romantic!" remarked Harry Kingwood, with a laugh. "Is the girl pretty?"

Mrs. Curtis turned fiercely upon him, her respect for him as her master's guest for a moment forgotten in her indignant rage at the tone of his question, and she replied sharply,—

"She isn't pretty—she's beautiful. And I can see it all now," she added, turning to her master, "that our old maid, Miss Grey, has been filling her mind with these things. I knew she'd been worrying her, because the child came to me about it. But there's one thing I can tell you, sir—when she comes into this house as mistress I shall walk out of it."

And so saying, Mrs. Curtis betook herself from the room, partly to smother her indignation, but principally to be able to indulge freely in her grief.

"Upon my word, you seem to have a lively time of it with your womankind," remarked Kingwood, with a laugh. "I had no idea I was coming into the midst of so much romance and mystery when I accepted your invitation to spend a week or two with you. What are you going to do, old man?"

"I'm going to find Elsie," was the quietly uttered, but somewhat angry rejoinder.

"Elsie is the runaway, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"And what about the other woman—the one who drove her away?"

"I'll make you a present of my interest in her," was the irritated retort. "I had forgotten Edith Grey's existence," Lionel went on; "I should have supposed she was married if I had thought of her at all, and I never wish to see her again, so drop your badinage, old man. The matter is a serious one, look at it from whatever side you will."

"Yes, I suppose it is serious," assented Kingwood, in a changed voice; then he asked, abruptly, "I suppose you mean to marry this girl?"

"No, I don't. Why, she's only a child!" was the answer.

"She'll grow out of that," remarked the guest quietly, "and she can't very well live in the house of a young bachelor like you without malicious tongues making their own comments about both of you."

"I don't see why. I am old enough to be her father!" replied Denison, shortly; "but I don't care where she lives, provided she is comfortable and happy."

Then he told his friend how he had found Elsie among the heather, and how Edith Grey had

refused to marry him because he would not send the child to the workhouse.

"I undertook a responsibility then, and I am not the man to shirk the consequences of my actions. I regard myself as this girl's guardian, and my first step now must be to find her."

"Yes, you are right," returned Kingwood, cordially; "and I'll do anything I can to help you. Now the first step is to get a full description of the girl, but I suppose the people of the house can supply that."

"No doubt they can; and here is her photograph!" was the answer.

And as he spoke Lionel Denison took from his pocket-book the *carte de-visite* of herself which Elsie had sent him.

"By Jove, it's the girl I saw at the railway-station!" exclaimed Kingwood, in amazed surprise. "She had no eyes for me, but she was staring at you. She was a lovely creature, and I should have managed to make her acquaintance if I'd been alone."

Denison frowned; he felt annoyed at hearing his friend speak in this light manner of the girl, whom, as a child, he had rescued from evil associations, yet at the same time he was glad to think that through this recognition it would be easy to trace her; so with an effort he repressed his vexation, and asked,—

"Are you sure that it was the original of this portrait that you saw?"

"Quite sure. There is a look about the girl that even in a photograph there is no mistaking. You wouldn't find another face like that in a day's march. I am sure I saw her, and she recognized you, I believe, for she looked at you intently until you turned her way, and then she hastened to the booking-office. It was just as we were leaving the station."

"Then I will walk down to the station at once and try to ascertain the name of the place to which she took her ticket," said Denison, rising. "I hope I shall be able to trace her, poor child."

"Yes, it is to be hoped you will. I'll walk down with you; it's an awkward business, though."

Denison made no reply; something in his friend's tone jarred upon him, and he quietly made up his mind that if he did find Elsie he would take good care to keep her well out of Kingwood's way.

So they walked down to the railway station, made inquiries of the booking-clerk, and after some trouble managed to ascertain that the young lady in question had taken a ticket for Victoria.

Hither they followed her, but it was late when they reached town, and here all trace of her ended.

She had brought no luggage with her, and she had probably walked out of the station without being observed by anyone.

Weary and depondent, Lionel Denison returned to the Hermitage; but though it was midnight before he and his friend reached the old house they found Mrs. Curtis and her husband anxiously awaiting them.

"No news, sir?" asked the poor old woman, brokenly, as she saw failure written upon her master's face.

"No news whatever," he replied, "except that she has gone to London. You don't know of any friend to whom she could go, do you?"

"I don't know what friends she could have, sir, except they were schoolfellows," replied the old woman, dejectedly; "and I don't suppose they could do anything for her. You don't suppose that Miss Grey knows where she is, do you, sir?"

"Miss Grey?" he echoed, with something like indignant surprise; then his voice changed, for he remembered that Elsie, in her letter, had spoken of his old love as the cause for her present conduct; and he said in an altered tone, "No, I don't think it at all probable; but we can do nothing more to-night."

Then he shook his friend's hand and went to his own room, the first night of his return to his old home being almost as wretched as those nights he had spent when he brought

Elsie to his house, and Edith refused to be reconciled.

"There must be some evil influence upon the place," he muttered, as he paced the spacious, low ceilinged apartment with weary, restless steps. "Fifteen years ago I went through all this and more than this, and now I come back to my native land hoping to have a little peace and quiet happiness. And I am met on the threshold by this painful affair. It is almost a pity I ever adopted the girl, for I should then have felt no anxiety for her future, and now my sense of justice tells me that I am responsible for it."

So he tormented himself until exhausted nature asserted her sway, and he threw himself upon the bed, where he slept heavily until daybreak.

The only cheerful countenance in the Hermitage that morning belonged to Harry Kingwood. He was naturally a careless, easy-going fellow, fond of his own pleasure, and not too careful for the feelings of others, and he had formed a little scheme of his own with regard to pretty Elsie, in which the sentiments of his friend Denison were not at all to be taken into consideration.

Now he smiled and talked as though something pleasant rather than painful had happened, and he spoke of Elsie's return in a few days as a matter of certainty.

But his words gave no consolation to his host, who did not ask him to accompany him to town when he started immediately after breakfast.

A repudiation of Elsie's letter convinced him, for the time at least, that Edith Grey had not been a party to her disappearance; the poor, impulsive girl had been prompted by the desire to do the best she could to promote his happiness, and in her mistaken idea of what would conduce to this end she had not hesitated to sacrifice herself.

The thing now to be done was to save her from the consequences of her rash act, and to convince her that her presence at the Hermitage rather than her absence would conduce to his comfort.

He felt reluctant, however, to express these thoughts to Kingwood, and he more than half regretted having told him how he had first discovered the missing girl, for something in his friend's tone convinced him that he was inclined to think lightly of her in consequence, and to regard her as a legitimate subject for sport.

So he went to London alone, and sought an interview with a certain well-known detective, to whom he gave all the information he considered necessary for the purpose of tracing Elsie.

But he might have spared himself the trouble of trying to hide his movements from his friend; for Harry Kingwood, only too glad to be free, came to London a couple of hours after Denison, and paid a visit to the self-same detective, from whom he learnt that Lionel had been here before him.

"All right, my man, act for both of us," he replied, promptly, when he received this piece of information; "only let me get any news you may have twelve hours in advance of your other client! Is it a bargain?"

For a second or two the fellow hesitated, then he said slowly,—

"Yes, sir; twelve hours in advance—twelve hours you said!"

"I did," was the answer. "You agree?"

The man replied in the affirmative. He made a point of always selling his information to the highest bidder.

Besides employing a detective who seemed to be unable to discover anything, Lionel Denison advertised in the agony column of the *Times* for Elsie, entreating her to return, or to give some sign that she was safe and well.

And in due time an answer to this came, the genuineness of which many persons besides Mr. Denison doubted.

"Elsie is well and happy, and she entreats that her friends will not trouble about her," ran the advertisement, and whether Elsie had dictated it or not was a question which no one at present could answer, but as no other message came, and no trace of the girl could be

discovered, Lionel tried to extract from it some consolation.

Meanwhile the news of Elise's flight had spread about the neighbourhood until it came to the ears of Miss Grey.

"Thank Heaven, she is gone!" she remarked, a few days after the news had reached her. "Now she is out of the way the coast will be clear."

"That's right, my dear, be thankful for small mercies," returned the mother, sarcastically; "and your mercies are always uncommonly small."

Her daughter affected not to hear this last remark, and she observed, airily,—

"I wonder Lionel hasn't called. I suppose this girl's ridiculous behaviour has upset him."

"It has upset him, no doubt, but he won't call!" replied the mother, exultingly. "He won't call!"

"It's very horrid of you to say so, mother!" retorted Edith, angrily; then she added, with sudden delight,—

"Here he is; you are wrong this time, you see. He is coming up the garden path."

She was right.

Lionel Denison was approaching the house, but he came with anything but the bearing and manner of a lover.

CHAPTER IV.

LIKE AN OVER RIFE PEACH.

THE house in which Mrs. Grey and her daughter lived was a large, red-brick building with huge plate-glass windows, through which could be seen handsome curtains and staring, though costly ornaments.

It stood alone in an extensive garden, and there was something peculiarly pretentious in the wide gates and the bright, yellow-red gravel path which led up to the house.

"We are well-to-do and we wish you to know it," was what the whole place seemed to say to the visitor, and this tone particularly struck Lionel Denison as he knocked at the door this dull afternoon, a fortnight after his return to the Hermitage.

"I wouldn't change my shabby old house for this one if I were offered a good sum to boot," he thought, as he waited for the servant to answer his knock. "It never struck me so unpleasantly as it does to-day."

At this stage his meditations were interrupted by the door being opened by a woman-servant who, in answer to his question, replied that Mrs. Grey was at home.

"My dear Lionel, how very glad I am to see you," exclaimed the old lady, with whom he had always been a favourite. "How well you look, and how handsome!" she went on, with the license of old age. "It's a pity you didn't bring a wife back with you, for now all the girls will be in a flutter when you speak to them."

Lionel looked surprised, and for a second or two he suspected that Mrs. Grey was laughing at him, but this was evidently not the case.

Advancing years and frequent bickerings with her daughter had brought certain dormant qualities in her mind to the front, and in priding herself upon being candid, and saying exactly what she thought, the old lady had developed the faculty of being peculiarly offensive at times.

There was no hypocrisy about her, however; if she said a thing she sincerely meant it, and when she told Lionel that he looked handsome she simply uttered her thoughts aloud.

Seeing this, after a momentary glance, he smiled, and told her how well she was looking, and together they talked lightly and brightly for a few minutes.

"I suppose Miss Grey is quite well?" he asked, when there was a lull in the old lady's chatter.

"Oh, yes, Edith is always well," was the answer. "She's gone to her room to touch up her face and change her dress, but she knows that you are here, and she will be down directly."

Again the young man looked in surprise at his companion, but she was evidently talking as she was accustomed to talk, and he mentally pitied

the daughter whose little weaknesses were thus so naively exposed.

A tremble of the handle of the door, a fluttering movement as it swung back on its hinges, and then Edith Grey stood before the self-same man, whom fifteen years ago she had refused to marry.

The flush that overspread her face was real, so was the droop of her downcast eyelids, but Time with its merciless hand had worn the once beautiful face, and art, instead of repairing, had only added to its ravages.

A woman who is plain at seventeen will not unfrequently appear good-looking, if not positively handsome, at two-and-thirty; but for her whose beauty depends upon the charm of youth the lapse of fifteen years is well-nigh fatal.

Edith Grey had been very lovely as a girl, but cosmetics had spoiled her complexion; her hair bore but too evident traces of being dyed, while her figure was a wonder of art, so tightly-laced and so sylph-like had she made it.

Of her success upon this point she was quite aware, and let the weather be ever so cold, or ever so wet, and let the fashion of the day be what it would, she carefully abstained from wrapping bulky garments round her graceful form. Indeed, without her face her figure would well have passed as belonging to a woman of one or two-and-twenty, but when seen with it the suspicion that she was over-laced and made-up was inevitable.

She stood now looking at Lionel with a fawn-like, timid expression, ready to fly to his arms and fling herself upon his breast at the slightest sign of encouragement; but never in this world was a man less lover-like than the one for whom she was prepared to show so much gushing affection.

He rose to his feet, it is true, when she entered the room, but he did not advance to meet her; he spoke coldly and formally when she addressed him, and he barely touched her hand, though she would have left it in his clasp most willingly.

With a gasp and a sigh which was only too genuine, Edith sank into a chair, and gazed admiringly at the man whom she would now have given all she possessed to win.

"How wearily the time has passed since you went away!" she murmured, dreamily; "and yet it seems but yesterday."

"It seems a far-away yesterday to me," he replied, with a bitter laugh. "So far away," he added, "that it is rather like a time that belonged to another person than to myself; I have outlived and outgrown so many things since then."

The scheming woman sighed, and real tears sprang to her eyes; but they were tears of mortification rather than of wounded affection.

"Ah, yes! men have the advantage of women," she said, sadly; "they can travel about and see the world, and forget those whom they have left at home, while a woman must sit at home and pine and fret her heart away."

"Perhaps you are right," he returned, indifferently. "I can't speak from experience, for I left no one behind whom I wished to remember, and there was no one to pine or fret for me; but I called to-day, partly to see an old friend," and he bowed to Mrs. Grey, "and partly to ask if either of you ladies know anything about my little girl."

"Your little girl!" echoed Edith indignantly, "of whom are you speaking?"

"Surely you need not ask that question," he said, quietly; "I mean the child whom you and I found so many years ago among the heather."

"The child that came between us!" she exclaimed, spitefully.

He shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of impatience, then he returned coldly,—

"I think the less we say upon that subject the better. What I am anxious about at present is to find Elise, and from many circumstances that have come to my knowledge I thought you could help me."

"Then pray disabuse your mind of such a delusion," retorted Miss Grey, tartly, "I don't in the least know where your foundling is."

"And if she did know she would not tell you,"

interposed Mrs. Grey, with a chuckle, "not she, indeed!"

"Will you be quiet, mother!" cried Edith, sharply. Then she assumed an air of dignity, and turning to Lionel she said,—

"It is a very singular thing for you to come here and ask if we know anything about a girl for whom I have always entertained the most intense dislike. You don't suppose that we have shut her up in any part of this house, do you?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what do you suspect?" she asked, scornfully. "Pray be frank," she added as he hesitated; "there is nothing like speaking one's mind." Thus challenged, the young man hesitated.

One cannot always put one's thoughts into words without making them grossly offensive, and he had neither the right nor the desire to insult these two women.

To make his position more awkward also, he could not show them Elise's letter, because in it she assumed that his love for Edith and hers for him had undergone no change, and he saw that Miss Grey was trying to imply that, as far as she was concerned, this was the case.

So he blundered and hesitated and replied vaguely, "that he thought she might know where she had gone, as Elise in the letter she had left behind her mentioned Miss Grey's name."

"Mentioned my name—what did she say?" demanded Edith, while her face became livid with rage.

"I have not the letter with me," he replied, coldly, "but she implied that she had seen you, and that in consequence of what you had said to her she left my house."

"The deceitful minx!" cried Miss Grey, passionately. "The idea of mentioning my name as an excuse for her own worthless conduct! Did you ever hear of such shameless audacity, mother!"

And she turned anxiously to her parent. But if he expected any real help from this quarter she was doomed to disappointment, for the old lady responded cautiously,—

"Hear what, my dear?"

"Such conduct as that of the girl whom Lionel picked up years ago," replied the daughter, desperately.

"I don't know what you mean," was the answer.

"And I am in the same puzzled condition, and should feel obliged if you will explain yourself, Miss Grey," observed Lionel, severely.

"Well, I mean this," was the passionate reply: "The girl about whom you are so anxious was seen the day before yesterday in London, seated in a landau with a gentleman, with whom she was evidently on the best of terms."

"Were they alone?" asked Lionel, gravely.

For half a second Edith hesitated, then she replied boldly,—

"Yes, they were alone."

"And what is the inference you draw from what you tell me?" he asked, rendered suspicious by the evident spite with which the assertion was made.

"I don't allow my mind to dwell upon such subjects," was the repellent answer. "I should not have alluded to the matter to you if you had not driven me to do so, and I shall feel obliged by your not mentioning this creature's name to me again."

"Certainly, if you wish it," he replied, haughtily; "though before the matter drops I should be glad to know the name of the person who told you this story."

"No one told me the story, for I saw the girl with my own eyes," was the rejoinder. "I was in London the day before yesterday."

"Yes, she was. She tells you the truth there," he chimed in the old lady, glad to hear again the sound of her own voice; "but I don't suppose there's any harm in driving in an open carriage with a young man's broad daylight. It's what you've done yourself often enough, Edith."

But Miss Grey tossed her head indignantly, and though she said nothing, the expression of

her face conveyed the idea that what she accused Edith of doing was something very heinous.

"I suppose you could not have mistaken someone else for my little girl!" asked Lionel. "It would be an easy thing to do under the circumstances."

"I was not mistaken," was the disdainfully uttered reply.

And having said this, Edith walked across the room to a cabinet which stood against the wall, and stood toying with some of the curiosities upon it.

She wished to show her old lover that the subject they had been discussing was exceedingly distasteful to her, and she thought also that he might as well have an opportunity of admiring her graceful figure.

But, alas! for the blindness of man, the graceful curves of which Edith was so proud were quite thrown away upon Mr. Denton; and while he more than half disbelieved the story he had heard, he felt that there was nothing more to be learnt in this quarter to-day.

So he rose to go, and shook hands with the old lady cordially.

But when Edith turned to bid him adieu she only half extended her hand, though she fixed upon him such an appealing, languishing glance that he, somewhat taken aback and anxious to get away, bowed hastily, muttered "Good-morning, Miss Grey," and precipitately fled.

"Well!" exclaimed Edith, angrily, "I would never have believed that Lionel could be so rude."

"You may call it 'well,' but most people would call your behaviour very unwomanly," said her mother, sharply. "He didn't come here expecting you to be like an over-ripe peach, ready to fall into his hand without invitation. I am sorry for you, Edith, and I am disgusted also."

"I don't know what you are talking about," exclaimed the latter, tartly. "I never uttered a word that all the world might not have heard, but it was enough to make my blood boil for him to come here to ask me about that creature."

"And a nice story you told him," sneered the old lady. "It was rather clumsy, though; it doesn't do to invent things on the spur of the moment."

"As it happens it wasn't an invention," retorted Edith, turning sharply upon her parent.

"I did see her in a carriage with a man, and with a man whom a girl who cared for her reputation would avoid."

"Really!" asked the old lady, her love of a bit of scandal overcoming her desire to provoke her daughter. "You really did see her with a man who is known to be fond of the ladies?"

"If I hadn't seen her I shouldn't have said I had," snapped Edith, the malice in her heart showing itself painfully in her worn countenance. "And I hate that expression of yours—'fond of the ladies.' I call it perfectly disgusting."

"You are really shocked," sneered her mother. "But do you really mean to tell me that this girl has gone wrong?"

"I wish to Heaven that she had," was the wickedly spiteful rejoinder, "and I'll take good care that she does," she muttered under her breath. "She'll go sooner or later; it's only helping her on a little."

Then she went out of the room, leaving her mother to surmise the purport of the words which she could not distinctly hear. The mother was somewhat startled, however, when, half-an-hour afterwards, her daughter walked into the room with her hat on, and remarked,—

"I may not be home in time for dinner, so don't wait for me."

"Where are you going that you can't come home by seven o'clock?" asked the mother, suspiciously.

"I am going to town," was the answer, "and I have a good deal of shopping to do; be sure you don't wait."

Then she bestowed on her mother a frosty kiss, and went off to avoid the chance of further question.

"I wish I could follow her without being seen," mused Mrs. Grey, restlessly; "or I wish I could get hold of Lionel Denton at this moment, and tell him half of what I suspect, so that he might

keep Edith in sight, and rescue the girl from her clutches. That daughter of mine is up to some mischief, I am sure; there was the look of a fiend in her eyes as she left the house."

But though she thus fretted, the old lady made no effort to have Edith followed.

During the last ten years mother and daughter had drifted completely asunder; there was no confidence between them, and but very little affection, and they lived together purely from habit and self-interest.

For though each had an income, they had neither of them sufficient to keep up this big house with comfort, though by living together they could do so, and yet have something to spare.

Inspired by jealousy and malice, Edith Grey drove in her pony-chaise to the railway-station. When about to alight she observed a fair, handsome young man, with light brown hair and a heavy moustache, who looked hard at her, as though he was struck with surprise at her charms.

Ever ready to accept admiration, and believing, despite all her matrimonial failures, that she had great attractions, Edith for the moment lost sight of the purpose that had brought her here, and she tried to look confused, and she blushed, while she positively forgot for a moment to take her ticket.

She was soon reminded of this by seeing others go to the booking-office; and after making a great fuss about getting her purse out of her pocket she purchased her ticket, pretending not to observe the stranger, who was close behind her, and for whose benefit she pronounced the word "Victoria" in a louder tone than she would otherwise have used.

He likewise took a ticket for Victoria; and while on the platform he kept very close to her, so that when the train stopped at the station he opened the carriage-door and held it open so that she might enter, following her himself into the same compartment.

The vain, selfish creature's heart was in a flutter, for the stranger was young and handsome; he was evidently also a gentleman, and she felt that if he were worth marrying, and she could secure him, such a consummation would be a complete compensation for all her previous failures.

There were other people in the carriage, but these two were seated opposite each other, close to one of the doors, and the desirability of having the window opened or closed formed a pretext for the exchange of a few words.

But despite the rapt manner in which he had gazed at her the stranger did not appear to be very eager to talk to her about herself or himself, and it was, of course, impossible for her to ask him many questions.

On giving up their tickets at Grosvenor-road she observed that he as well as herself had a return ticket, and she wondered who he could be and where he lived.

At Victoria they alighted together, and he courteously asked if he should call her a cab.

His question recalled the object of her visit to her mind, and she replied,—

"No, thank you; I will walk. I—"

He did not stay to hear more, but lifted his hat and turned away, seeming to leave her.

While she, mortified at this abrupt termination of her little romance, went on her way angrily, without either looking to the right or to the left.

She would not have been a little surprised, however, if she had known that the handsome stranger was following and watching her; and she would not, perhaps, have been very well pleased had she been told who he was, and why he was so interested in her movements.

For he was no other than Harry Kingwood, and he more than suspected that by following her he should find Elsie.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW EXPERIENCE.

HARRY KINGWOOD was right in supposing that he had seen Elsie at the railway station. The

overstrung girl had so timed her departure from the Hermitage that she should meet its returning owner.

In going away from this place for ever, she wished to carry with her the memory of the man who had been her greatest and her truest friend.

She knew that she should recognise him from his photograph; but there is often something about the living original that no photograph can portray, and she wanted to feel that she had seen the man to whom she owed so much before she went out single-handed to battle with the world.

Of the folly of the step she was taking she was all too ignorant, the spirit of self-sacrifice was strong within her, and in her desire to atone to Lionel Denton for his suffering in the past, she felt that it mattered little what consequences she entailed upon herself.

The train had been in some minutes, and she was hastening towards the station when she saw two gentlemen at the doorway giving orders to a porter and a cabman about some luggage.

A glance at the group told her that one of them was the man upon whose face she had desired to gaze, and so intent was she in carrying away a vivid recollection of him, that she did not in any way observe his friend until she found him staring at her in such an offensive manner that she turned indignantly and looked another way.

As she did so she heard Lionel Denton's voice, and she thought it would linger in her memory so long as life should last.

It was all the work of a few seconds; but as she looked on the face of the man who had stood in the place of a father to her she felt her heart throb, and a wave of emotion swept over her whole being such as never in her life had she hitherto experienced.

Scarcely knowing what she did after this, she tore herself from the spot, took her ticket for London, and, entering a first-class carriage, she got into a corner, and gave herself up to the aimless, purposeless dreams that seemed to have made a home in her heart.

Arrived at Victoria, she entered a cab and told the man to drive to a house in Palace Gardens, where she alighted.

Though it was evening by this time, she was evidently expected, and the respectful manservant led her upstairs to the boudoir of his young mistress.

"Elsie, dearest, I am so glad you have come; it is so late that I was beginning to fear you would disappoint me," cried Isolt Greatrex eagerly, as she clasped the lone girl in her arms.

Then she looked at poor Elsie's fair face, and exclaimed, with ready sympathy,—

"How pale you are, dear, and you are famished, I have no doubt! We will have tea brought here, and we will have a piece of chicken, or something nice; but you know, I am so sorry papa has a dinner party this evening, and I shall be obliged to sit at the head of the table, but I won't stay away from you long, I promise you."

"Oh, don't mind me," responded Elsie, sadly. "I shall be very comfortable if you would give me a book, though I suppose I really ought to try on the clothes you have so kindly provided for me."

"They will fit you, I am sure, and if they won't my maid can alter them," was the ready reply; "and I am not going to let you worry yourself to-night. You will have worry enough when you go to live with Mrs. Maltby, I can tell you."

Elsie smiled sadly.

Her friend had obtained for her a situation as secretary and companion to a lady of advanced views and imperfect education, whose burning desire it was to train the rising generation according to a plan of her own.

This Mrs. Maltby had had a whole host of secretaries of both sexes, and likewise a legion of companions; but they had possessed opinions of their own, they had been too ugly or too handsome, they had been cringing or they had gone to the opposite extreme of being arrogant; something had always happened to curtail the length of their residence in this eccentric lady's handsome abode.

Now the rich woman had determined to take a secretary who was very young—a girl who had

just left school, and who had not yet been contaminated by contact with the world.

An orphan girl, she thought, would be very desirable.

One who had no near relatives, and but very few friends, was what Mrs. Maltby wished to find, so that there could be no repetition of a scene which had happened previously, when her beloved son had suffered a horrow-whipping at the hands of an indignant father, and had been glad to say nothing about it.

Isolt Greatrex had heard that Mrs. Maltby required a young girl as her secretary, and having by the same morning post received a letter from her old schoolmate, Elsie, saying vaguely that she wanted to find something to do, as she meant to leave the Hermitage before the return of her guardian, the kind-hearted creature at once set to work to secure the appointment.

She managed to preserve Elsie's secret at the same time, for the poor little wail had resolved to avoid anything that could lead to her identification, to change her name and try to obliterate the past.

Isolt knew her; she could say that she had been to school with her, and Elsie was sure that if her friend did not quite sympathise with her feelings, she would, at any rate, be true to her and maintain her secret.

Mr. Greatrex was a merchant and a politician, and Isolt, who was four years older than Elsie, was his only child. It was therefore easy enough for her to invite her friend to come to the house and stay the night, and she did so, though she took good care to keep her in own rooms, and refrained from introducing her to any of her friends.

If Elsie had not been so lovely Isolt would probably not have been so cautious. But Mr. Greatrex was a great admirer of beauty. He was likewise a widower, and his daughter lived in hourly dread of the advent of a stepmother.

So, though she meant to be kind to Elsie, she had no intention of introducing her to her father in any way to attract his attention, for he was a very absent-minded man, and it was quite possible that if he met Elsie on the stairs or in the hall he would scarcely look at her, while if she were brought forward and her charms pointed out to him, there was just the possibility that he might become enamoured.

Elsie knew too little of the ways of the world, and she was too eager to hide herself from anyone who might at any time meet her guardian, to be conscious that her reception by her friend was not what it would have been had she still been regarded by her as an heiress, and as Mr. Denton's ward.

Instead, therefore, of resenting the want of outward consideration, she was grateful for the almost secret way in which she was entertained, and she was not a little thankful the next morning to be able to go to her situation without having come face to face with Mr. Greatrex.

"I shall drive you down to Maltby Grange, and I shall let Mrs. Maltby see that you are not to be imposed upon for want of friends," remarked Isolt, when Elsie had finished her solitary breakfast. "I am afraid she will try to get all the work she can out of you, my dear."

"I don't mind how much work I do if she is only kind to me," replied Elsie, plaintively. "Do you know what kind of a woman she is? Has she any daughters?"

"No, she has no daughters, but she has one son," replied Isolt, gravely.

As she spoke she looked at Elsie, and a word of warning with regard to this young man rose to her lips.

But there was something so pure and innocent in her companion's face that the words died upon her tongue, and she felt she would be doing her the greatest kindness by leaving her in blissful ignorance of the character of the man who resided under the roof that was to be her home.

"Who knows, he may not like her at all!" she mused, "or he may like her so much that he will treat her with proper respect, and, whatever warning a girl may or may not receive, she

must herself make a man know how to esteem her."

In which conclusion she was undoubtedly right, and her own conduct in remaining silent was far more prudent than might reasonably have been expected of her.

So Elsie rode towards the Grange, quite unconscious of any danger except that of having an exacting and dissatisfied task-mistress.

To call the house in which the Maltbys lived a grange was to indulge in a polite fiction.

It was a handsome house, standing in extensive gardens, very near the bank of the river, and a wide ditch, which Mrs. Maltby asserted to have been part of a moat, ran along one side of the grounds until it nearly reached the house.

Happily for the health of the inmates of the mansion it branched away before it could do any mischief, and thus saved them from its unwholesome proximity. When Mrs. Maltby made this assertion about the ditch having been part of a moat, her listeners never ventured to contradict her, but at the same time, they never took the trouble to believe her.

Those who came to Maltby Grange came for their own purposes, and had no idea beyond the desire to compass their own ends; so that if Mrs. Maltby, seated at the head of her own table, had gravely asserted that the moon was made of green cheese they would have smiled and yawned, have taken a sip from their wine glasses, and have said that it was highly probable.

The carriage in which the two girls sat passed through the lodge gates, swept up a handsome drive, and came to a standstill before an imposing doorway, which at the moment stood open.

In answer to an inquiry from Miss Greatrex, a footman informed her that Mrs. Maltby was at home, and, having taken in her card, he conducted the visitors to the presence of his mistress.

The room into which he led them was not a large one, but the heat of it was overpowering, for, though the day was warm, a large fire burned in the grate.

A couple of bookcases filled with books covered a good portion of the walls, while tables stood where there was any space for them—tables that groaned under the pile of books, pamphlets, and MSS. with which they were laden. Opposite the fire was a large round table with drawers in the top, and on this were some hundreds of letters and papers, the former having all of them been opened, and some of them having been read. Books, cuttings from newspapers, folios, and seals, and paper-knives and paper-weights were all tumbled together on this wonderful table before which sat the mistress of the place.

She was a short, slender woman with hair that had once been black, though now it showed marked signs of unskillfully applied dye. Her countenance was red all over; her features were regular, though somewhat thick; but the most remarkable part of her face was a pair of exceedingly large, prominent black eyes, which the owner thereof had a habit of rolling about in a most uncomfortable manner.

She never, except she were in a rage, could be induced to look another person full in the face; but when talking to anyone she looked at the large diamond ring with which she was constantly playing, or fixed her eyes upon some object that was above the head of her audience.

This peculiarity gave her an air of wisdom and likewise of insincerity; and poor Elsie, as she looked at the singular being who was about to engage her services, felt her heart sink with dread.

She had gone too far, however, to turn back now; be the path of life strewn with roses or with thorns, her tender feet must tread them, and there would be no sympathising heart at hand to afford her pity.

Mrs. Maltby rose as the two girls approached her, and she presented a check to Miss Greatrex to kiss.

Then she turned to Elsie, gave her a limp hand to shake, and remarked, plaintively,—

"I am so glad you have come, Miss—Miss—"

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"Heath," suggested Elsie, with a blush.
"Yes, I remember—Miss Heath. As I observed, I am glad you have come. I have that pile of letters to answer, and I want you to help me. Will you take off your hat here, and sit down at once?"

"Yes," assented Elsie.
But she was feeling suffocated, and she longed to go to the room that was to be her own, and to brace herself up to the task of sitting with this strange woman in this heated atmosphere.

It was useless thinking of what she would like, however; so she took off her hat and gloves, and seated herself at a small table between the two windows, thus putting as great a distance as was possible between herself and the fire.

"Before you two begin your laborious work I think I will say good-bye," said Miss Greatrex, feeling anxious to get out of the stifling place.
"Good-bye, Elsie; I shall come and see you soon. Good-bye, Mrs. Maltby."

"Don't go now; stay to luncheon," replied Mrs. Maltby, absently. "Clarence is somewhere about the house; he will amuse you while Miss Heath and I get on with our letters."

But Miss Greatrex declined the tempting invitation, for Clarence Maltby was no favourite of hers, and experiences had taught her the great undesirability of being a solitary guest at Maltby Grange.

So she went away, feeling that she had done all that the most exacting friendship could expect of her for Elsie, but at the same time secretly thankful that the lines of her own life had been cast in more pleasant places.

For two whole hours Mrs. Maltby dictated, in a slovenly fashion, the letters which Elsie had to write, while the poor girl's head swam, her hand trembled, and more than once she felt as though she must fall off her chair in a dead faint.

The sound of a gong had twice echoed through the house, when the study door was unceremoniously flung open, and a young man of some four or five-and-twenty came into the room, exclaiming in an angry voice,—

"I say, mother, are we going to have any lunch to-day? Ah! what an oven. I wonder you are not both of you baked."

And he walked straight to the windows and flung them wide open, as he remarked,—

"There! Now you can breathe. But I'm hungry—I do wish you would manage to be punctual at meal-time, mother. You'll kill yourself before you need do it if you go on like this."

"We have only four more letters to write," pleaded the mother.

But the son, in his masterful way, replied,—

"Four or forty, you won't do them before lunch, I can tell you. Ah! who is this! The secretary, I suppose. Introduce me."

Mrs. Maltby was a tyrant by nature, but habit made her obedient in small things to her only child, and she mentioned Elsie's name; then she rose from her seat with a sigh and prepared to go to the dining-room.

Elsie had paused from her work, the fresh air coming from the garden, laden with the perfume of flowers, revived her, and as Clarence Maltby fixed his bold, bad eyes upon her sweet innocent face, he thought he had never seen anything so lovely.

"Come, Miss Heath," he said, with unusual politeness, "you can't live without food, if my mother can; this way, please."

So saying, he walked by her side through the marble-paved hall to the dining-room, where the meal was awaiting them.

Mrs. Maltby went first, and as she moved slowly on with her big eyes fixed on vacancy, she looked very much as though she were rehearsing the part of Lady Macbeth in the sleep-walking scene.

There was something positively tragic in the manner in which she took her seat at table; and it is scarcely to be wondered, therefore, that Elsie was glad to turn to the young man, who talked cheerfully, and who made her laugh at his sallies of wit, that was, however, of a very homely and ordinary type.

A couple of men-servants waited upon them, and brought dish after dish as though it were an

elaborate dinner, but it was not until they had placed fruit and wine upon the table, and left the room, that Clarence Maltby remarked,—

"I say, mother, I've nothing to do this afternoon, so I shall take you and Miss Heath for a drive. At what time will you be ready to go?"

"Miss Heath and I have a quantity of work to do this afternoon, and you must go alone," was the somewhat irritable answer.

"I don't feel disposed to go alone," said the young man, in the tone of one whose will was law.

"Then go and ask Charlie Birch to ride or drive with you, for, as I tell you, I am busy, and you must leave me alone to-day."

"Charlie is a nuisance; she never forgets that she is an heiress. I hate women who are always thinking of their money, don't you, Miss Heath?"

"I really don't know," was the answer. "I have not considered the subject, but I suppose that people who have money do think of it sometimes."

"If they'd only do it sometimes I wouldn't mind; it's when they never forget it that I get mad," he replied, irritably.

"But come, mother, at what time will you be ready, for I mean to take you with me!"

"I can't tell you until my letters are written. There are four more that must be answered and posted to-day, then, perhaps, I may be able to go with you. And now, Miss Heath, if you are ready we will return to my study."

She rose as she said this, and Elsie followed her example, walking at a respectful distance behind.

But she had not proceeded many steps before she felt her hand grasped tightly, and Clarence Maltby bent so close to her ear that his lips brushed her cheek as he whispered,—

"I'll take care you don't stay in that room very long; it's enough to kill you."

The words were nothing; it was the look, the tone, and the manner that made the hot blood rush into Elsie's face as she withdrew her hand and bowed coldly, though with dignity, as she said,—

"Thank you."

Then she followed her task-mistress, little dreaming that the jealous mother had, by the aid of a glass, witnessed the whole scene, and had drawn her conclusions accordingly.

(To be continued.)

FACETIES.

"To what do you attribute the troubles of the world?" "The mobility of the lower jaw."

TOM: "She says her face is her fortune."

LUCY: "Well, she certainly ought to take advantage of the bankruptcy law."

JINGO: "What did the minister say when the plate came up?" "Hinge: 'He said he wouldn't mind so much if the buttons were all alike.'"

THE MAJOR: "And did the enemy keep up a running fire?" The Corporal: "Well, I kept up the running, and the enemy kept up the fire all right."

D'AUBER: "Here's my latest picture, 'The Battle.' I tell you war's a terrible thing." CYNICUS: "Oh, I don't think it's as bad as it's painted."

MRS. HENRY PECK: "First we got horseless carriages, and then wireless telegraphy. I wonder what next! Her Husband (meekly): "Wireless matrimony, perhaps."

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LOVER (bravely): "Sir, I want to marry your daughter." FATHER (coldly): "Well, I'm not surprised at that. If I were in your place, I think I should want to marry her myself."

TEACHER: "Now, Harry Smith, what happened on the Fifth of November?" HARRY SMITH (enthusiastically): "My little brother got his eye blown out and pa singed off all his moustache."

MAUD: "Do you know I really believe that Tom is going to propose." ETHEL: "I noticed that he was looking terribly sad about something or other; but then, you know, dear, it may not be that. Perhaps his mother is ill, or he isn't feeling well himself."

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SOCIETY.

THE German Emperor has conferred the Order of the Black Eagle upon the King of Spain.

THE Princess of Wales will make Sandringham her headquarters during the next four months.

WHEN a Chinese girl marries, she must wait four months before etiquette allows her to pay her first visit to her mother.

THE value of the china at Buckingham Palace and in the private apartments at Windsor is said to be at least £200,000.

SOME photographs taken by the Duchess of York might deservedly be called studies, for they are taken with evident care as to general effect and the point of view selected.

HER MAJESTY will reside at Windsor Castle from the 11th inst. until the 13th or 19th of December, when the Queen and Court will go to Osborne for the Christmas season, in accordance with the Queen's custom for many years past.

PRINCE MAX OF BADEN, whose health is now quite restored, has been visiting the King of Denmark at Bernstorff and the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Sweden and Norway at Stockholm. There is a rumour at Copenhagen that this trip is connected with a project of marriage between Prince Max and Princess Thyra of Denmark, third daughter of the Crown Prince. Prince Max is the nephew and ultimate heir-presumptive of the Grand Duke of Baden, and his mother is a sister of the Duke of Leuchtenberg, and a granddaughter of the Emperor Nicholas the First.

ALL stores at Windsor are under proper supervision, no materials being served out without a proper requisition signed by the head of the department concerned. Not a bag of dog-biscuits can even be ordered for the kennels unless on the proper printed form. The whole vast establishment is practically as methodically conducted as any great London business. This method, which was evolved by her Majesty and the late Prince Consort out of the chaos which descended from the days of George IV., entirely does away with the waste, extravagance, and the abominable perquisite system, and moreover enables her Majesty to exercise that wise control over her finances which enables her to keep the grandest establishment on relatively the smallest Royal income in Europe.

NOTWITHSTANDING the enormous amount of business with which she has to deal, the Queen is to a large extent her own housekeeper. The first thing every morning a paper of suggestions from the clerk of the kitchen is placed before her, from which, in her own hand, she orders the menus of the day, both for herself and such of her grandchildren as may be with her. These menus are at once sent to the kitchen, gardens, and other departments concerned, to obtain the viands required; and their contents duly entered, together with the quantities of materials used, in the books which are kept in the Royal kitchen. The Queen's chef receives a salary of £500 per annum, and has as satellites four master cooks, two roasting cooks, six apprentices, and six kitchen maids, besides pantrymen and other lesser lights.

THE Queen is very good to the tenants on her estates at Balmoral and Windsor. On the eve of Her Majesty's departure from Scotland she gives informal audiences to many of her older tenants, and never fails to give help where it is needed. The Queen has a most remarkable memory, not only for the facts which concern her immediate household, but also for those which concern the families of the poor people in whom she takes an interest. She is always informed of every birth, engagement, marriage, and death on the Balmoral estate, and the apparently insignificant facts which she remembers regarding her tenants are a startling testimony to the clearness of her memory. Not infrequently Her Majesty has her carriage stopped in order that she may speak to some old man or woman whom she knows, and whom she sees hobbling along the wayside.

STATISTICS.

ABOUT £20,000,000 is invested in the candy business in the United States.

THE height of the Rock of Gibraltar is about 1,437 feet.

THERE are only 100,000 Britishers in India—one to every 8,000 of the population.

IT has been computed that £70,000,000 per annum is paid to British shipowners for ocean carriage between ocean ports.

CANADA lacks only 237,000 square miles to be as large as the whole Continent of Europe; it is nearly thirty times as large as Great Britain and Ireland, and is 300,000 square miles larger than the United States.

GEMS.

THAT evil is half cured whose cause we know. It is of eloquence as of flame; it requires matter to feed it, motion to excite it, and brightness as it burns.

IN man there is an eternal conflict of mind and matter, spirit and flesh—two prisoners chained together, the one despising the other, yet ruled by him, and subservient to the needs of his lower nature.

THE true moment at which to call upon one's self to take any new step in virtue is at the fainting point, when it would seem so easy to drop all and give all up; when, if you do not, you make of yourself a power.

THOUGHT and action are most profitable when they proceed in union. Too exclusive devotion to either weakens them both. Thought without action, feeding only on itself, loses its inspiring power, and degenerates into useless reverie. Action without thought is hasty, erratic and untrustworthy, while if long continued in the same groove it becomes simply mechanical.

IT is frequent intercourse with those who hold different views that can alone make us mentally healthy and sound. We want the fresh air of another and a dissimilar mind to invigorate and stimulate our own; otherwise we grow puny and distorted, each settling down in his own petty groove, and imagining that the whole universe is therein contained.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

HOMER MADE WORCESTER SAUCE.—Chop, pound and pass through a sieve three anchovies, with three eschalots, then mix them with three tablespoonfuls of cayenne and half a teaspoonful of powdered cloves; stir this into two tablespoonfuls of either mushroom, tomato, or walnut catsup, then mix this in a stone jar with a quart of good vinegar, and bring it all just to the boil, in a bain-marie; now strain it, return to the jar, cover down closely, and let it stand in a cool place for forty-eight hours, after which bottle off and cork close.

CHICKEN RAMAKINE.—Ingredients: Three ounces of cooked chicken, one large tablespoonful of cooked spinach, one large tablespoonful of grated cheese, one hard-boiled egg, two raw yolks of egg, one teaspoonful of parsley, pepper and salt, a few drops of lemon-juice, one tablespoonful of stock (white). Chop the chicken, hard-boiled egg, and parsley. See the spinach is dry, and that it has either been very finely chopped or sieved. Mix it with the chicken, chopped egg, parsley, cheese, and seasoning, in a saucepan; add the stock, and stir till hot. Add the raw yolks, and season well. Slightly butter some small paper or china ramakin-cases, fill three-parts full with the mixture, and bake about five to ten minutes in a quick oven. Serve in the cases at once.

MISCELLANEOUS.

LION-FLESH is eaten as food by some African tribes.

OPAL MINING is one of the latest Australian mineral industries.

LARGE numbers of fish are drowned yearly in the sea, especially mackerel.

AT the Mint the profits are five shillings on every pound's worth of silver coined.

IN Germany water-pipes are made of glass with asphalt covering to prevent fracture.

IN some parts of Russia the only food for the people consists at present of acorns, leaves, and the soft bark of trees.

A PECULIAR clock, of the time of Charles I., was the lantern, or bird-cage, style, which hung from the walls high up, with its works exposed.

AN electric spark has been photographed by means of a special camera, in which the sensitive plate rotated at, it is said, a velocity of 2,500 revolutions per minute.

HALIBUT and hollibut are names as old as the English language. "But" signifies a flat fish, and the prefix refers to the deep and wide holes in which the fish is found.

THE great industry of tinning—in which housewives are now taking special interest—was known as long ago as the days of Pompeii, and our system is practically the same as was used at that time.

A BURMAN mile is about equal in length to two English miles. The word for "mile" in Burmese means "to sit," and a mile is the distance that a man goes before he considers it necessary to sit down.

NATURAL gas conveyed in bamboo tubes was utilised in China years ago, and one of their writers mentions boxes which repeated the sounds of persons' voices that were dead—a machine similar to the phonograph.

THERE is a special class of farm-labourers in Sweden who are given so many acres of land for their own use, in consideration of so many days' labour during the year for the owner of the farm. They are a sort of fixture to an estate, and their life exists in no other country.

IN Sweden yarn is not allowed to be sold if it contains 0.0009 per cent. of arsenic. A carpet has been condemned by the inspectors because it contained one thousandth part of a grain of arsenic in 16 square inches—that is, one grain in a piece of carpet 10½ square.

THE great libraries of Peking contain volumes of books numbered by the hundreds of thousands. In the archives of the Government are still to be found the ancient predictions of eclipses made with great accuracy, together with works on astronomy, which show a fair knowledge of that interesting science.

A SINGULAR custom prevails among the Tartars or Kurds. If a man loses his cattle or other property he pours a little brown sugar into a piece of coloured cloth, ties it up, and carries one such parcel to each of his friends and acquaintances. In return he is presented, according to circumstances, with a cow, or sheep, or a sum of money.

THE Turkish woman is marriageable at the age of nine years, and by Turkish law, at that age, if married, she is competent to manage her property, and dispose of one-third of her fortune. The law allows her to abandon her husband's house for just cause, and will protect her in so doing. She cannot be compelled to labour for the support of her husband.

AMONG the glaciers found in the Rocky Mountains, in America, is Grasshopper Glacier, which derives its name from the enormous quantity of grasshopper remains that are found on and in the glacier. Periodically the grasshoppers take their flight southward, and must cross the mountains. Their favourite route seems to be across the wide glacier, and in their passage scores of thousands of them succumb to the rigour of cold and wind, fall helpless upon the snow, and are finally entombed in the ice.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

H. L.—A man may not marry the widow of his deceased brother.

MURIEL—See answer to "Moonbeam" in our issue dated November 11th.

QUEST—If your wife happened still to be alive the marriage would be void.

FRANK—The I O U does not require a stamp, and is only evidence of the loan.

B. K.—The Jameson raid across the frontier took place on December 29th, 1896.

M.—Rashfulness is easily remedied if a person only have a little determination and self-reliance.

CONSTANT READER—It depends entirely upon the terms of the will under which she got the property.

A. R.—The poem you allude to, and which contains the story of the mistletoe bough, is called "Ginova."

DEPUTANT—There is no such verdict in the English criminal courts as "Not proven," but there is in the Scotch courts.

RECOLLECT—A debtor cannot plead the Statute of Limitations if he has been beyond the seas for the period prescribed by law.

F. G.—Members of the Royal Family have to obtain the Queen's consent before any marriage contracted by them is recognised.

BADDEREYER—When you meet him again be courteous but very cold. He owes you an apology. Be sure never to allow him to repeat the act.

AMBITION—In New Zealand, in Australia, in British Columbia, in Canada, you can peg out gold claims, subject, of course, to certain conditions.

ROSEWITZ—Try diluted acetic, muratic or hydrochloric acids, or chloroform. Methylated spirit, benzine, turpentine are also powerful cleansers.

H. A. Y.—He is as accessible by means of letter as any other business man; it might, indeed, be difficult for you to reach him personally at first.

JACK'S MOTHER—Unless he had a little capital it would be foolish to emigrate to a locality where he has no immediate prospect of a business opening.

RAT—The use of strong medicines often does it, so will sudden emotion such as severe grief; but in the majority of instances no one can say how it is brought about.

A. N.—The simplest method is when the metal has become quite dry, remove the red rust with stiff brush, or what is called a scratch brush; after that apply oil.

O. R.—Take a small piece of potash and let it stand in the open air until it flakes; then thicken it into a paste with pulverised gum arabic, which prevents it from spreading where it is not wanted.

VERA—From what you write we should say that you were in love with neither, and the right one has yet to appear. Do not mistake friendship for love, although it is a mistake which is frequently made.

WILL—The money would be equally divided between the brothers and sisters of the deceased. If the eldest brother is dead, his share will be equally divided between his children, his widow, if living, first taking her third.

DECOYED—Do not pander to his every trifling wish, or make too many sacrifices. Devotion, unless tempered with reason, avails nothing in such cases, and culminates in rendering the wife a martyr; and a slave, and the husband an exasperated tyrant.

R. B.—No, the husband cannot be compelled to support the wife if she has left him of her own free will, and declines to live in the home he has provided for her. Should she refuse his entreaties to return home she will have to provide for herself entirely.

MOXA—If he can give no satisfactory reason for the attitude he has taken up, it can only be that he has found he has mistaken his feelings for you, and is anxious to be released from any further attendance on you. If this is the case you are well rid of him.

LORNA—Skin the eels and wipe them dry; mix together some pepper and salt and rub well over, both inside and out. Curl the eels round in a soup plate (two good ones will fill it) and bake in a cool oven for two hours. To be eaten cold with bread and butter.

ROSEY—Place the fish into hot water, first adding a tablespoonful of vinegar and a small lump of salt. Let it boil slowly until the flesh looks as if it would leave the bone. Dish the hake without breaking it. Garnish with parsley, peas, and lemon slices, and serve with egg-sauce.

C. R.—Make a strong paste of fresh lime and water, and with a fine brush smear it as thickly as possible over all the polished surface requiring preservation. By this simple means fenders and fire-irons may be kept for months free from harm without further care or attention.

CHIMNEY—Wood crackles when it is ignited because the air expanded by heat forces its way through the pores of the wood with a crackling noise. Green wood makes less snapping than dry, because the pores contain less air, being filled with sap and moisture which extinguishes the flame, whereas the pores of dry wood are filled with air, which supports combustion.

A. J.—When it is said that a diamond is of the first water, what is meant is that the gem is free from the faintest tinge of colour, and that there are no flaws or specks in any part of it. It is also free from that dimness or mistiness which is apparent in many diamonds of inferior quality.

PATTY—Mix together one teaspoon of flour, one teaspoon of sugar, two teaspoonfuls of baking-powder. Beat up three eggs very light, stir them in the mixture and add two tablespoonfuls of milk; bake in a buttered tin or on buttered plates. Split open when cool, and spread with jam, or with cream and jam.

UNHAPPY BOB—The young man has proved himself utterly faithless and unreliable, and you would be foolish in the extreme to renew the former state of things. Send him back all his presents and letters, and make up your mind to deem as poor a lover from your mind and heart altogether.

BELUX—The cause of frequent blushing is, as a rule, self-consciousness and nervousness, and the only "remedy" we can suggest is a determination on your part to remove those causes by thinking less of yourself and the impression you are creating, and more of the people with whom you are conversing.

L. J.—Do nothing hastily, but give yourself opportunity for serious reflection that you may act in the manner that will be kindest both to yourself and the young man. An engagement entered into hastily in the present circumstances would be likely to entail much unhappiness and discomfort to you both.

SLANDER.

Have you never stood by a river side,
Where the current was strong and free,
Sweeping along with restless force
Down to the deep blue sea?

Have you never cast on the whirling tide
A leaf, or branch, or flower,
And seen it quickly borne from your sight,
Swept on by the wild waves power?

Have you never traced the river's course
Past forest, and town, and mill,
Till you found where it burst a tiny spring,
From the side of a far-off hill?

Well, so I have known a slanderous stream
To sweep through a peaceful town,
Till manhood's honour and woman's truth
Were borne by the current down.

And it gathered strength as it rushed along
By the breath of any stirred,
From subtle hints thrown slyly out,
And many a thoughtless word.

And a warm heart's trusting faith was dimmed
By spray from the filthy tide,
And the dearest hopes of a life were wrecked
In the maelstrom deep and wide.

And I traced the stream in its winding way,
Till I found the source of it all—
Twas only an idle, thoughtless jest
By careless lips let fall.

Ah! many a time a simple word
May fall on the fertile mould
Of an envious heart, and bring forth fruit
Of sorrow an hundredfold.

ASPER—Grease spots on carpets may be removed by covering with a paste made of fullers'-earth and spirits of turpentine. Let the paste remain on till thoroughly dry, and then brush off. If the spots are very bad, they may need to be slightly rubbed with the paste—not too hard, or the fullers'-earth will be difficult to get out.

R. P.—A good cement for glass is made of a thick solution of gum arabic and plaster of paris. Make a thick paste and apply to the broken edges with a brush, join the parts carefully together, and set away. A cement equally good is cherry gum, or the sap which is found on the cherry tree. Rub the gum on the edges and unite.

NITA—The fact that you have attained your twentieth year without any offer of marriage should not cause you anxiety. There are few women who may not marry if they choose, and sooner or later your opportunity will appear; it is better, however, to remain single than to contract a loveless marriage merely for the sake of being married.

OLD READER—Pearls are carbonate of lime, the same substance of which the shell of the oyster is composed, and are identical with the "mother-of-pearl" which forms the interior of the pearl oyster shell. A high temperature will reduce any pearl to common lime, and in the heat of an ordinary fire a pearl will completely lose its identity and become a pinch of white powder.

KATE—Stew twelve pared and cored apples in a saucepan over a slow fire, with a little bruised ginger, three or four cloves, a bit of lemon-peel, and two teaspoonfuls of brown sugar. Boil a quarter of a pound of rice with a pint of milk, an ounce of butter, two ounces of sugar, and half a lemon-peel grated. Make it stiff enough to put around a dish. Pour the custard over apples. Beat the whites of eight eggs to a stiff froth, place this on top of apples, sprinkle with sugar, and bake a light brown.

VIOLET LEWIS—You should not be so stout at only twenty years of age! Unless it be constitutional with you, you would effect a great improvement by taking plenty of healthy outdoor exercise, such as long walks. Avoid water drinking, and all rich and fatty foods. Live plainly and well, but do not attempt starving yourself, as you would only injure your health. Thank you for your kind appreciation of the LONDON READER. Your words give us great pleasure.

ELLA—If the maggots of the moths are in, brush them well out; but wherever the moth has eaten you cannot prevent the fur from coming out. When well brushed hang it in the open air—the sunnier the place the better. Shake and brush two or three times, and finally rub in plenty of powdered camphor, which may be mixed with ground pepper. There is no better mixture for keeping off the moth, but it will not kill the grubs; they must be brushed and picked out, and killed when caught.

CAERNE—One pound ood, one tablespoonful vinegar, a little parsley, one dessertspoonful fenugreek, half pint water, one teaspoonful butter, salt and pepper; take the skin and bone from the ood, and cut it up in inch square pieces; put the pieces on with the vinegar and the water to boil; when it quite boils up take out the ood and keep it warm, mix in a bowl the flour and water, and mix then the butter, pepper and salt, and when mixed add the parsley finely chopped; pour the boiling liquid over it, and then return it all to the pan and stir till it boils, beat up the egg and stir it in; pour all this sauce over the fish, and serve very hot.

C. G.—In two quarts boiling water put one pound of treacle or molasses, stir together till well mixed, then add six or eight quarts of cold water and a teaspoonful of yeast; put it into a close earthen jar, cover with a coarse cloth two or three times doubled, and it will be fit to drink in two or three days. It may also be bottled. Another way:—Boil three-quarters of a pound of hops in fifteen gallons of water, add seven pounds of treacle, and stir until dissolved. Strain, and when cool ferment with half-pound of yeast; a little cayenne boiled with the hops is an improvement in winter. Try through your local druggist.

IN DESPAIR—Turpentine applied freely to the place they are believed to infest is the best cure. Some good housekeepers steep brown paper in turpentine, and fasten it underneath all the furniture, whilst others put powdered bitter apple and pieces of camphor into the various corners of sofas, armchairs, &c. Things to be packed away should be previously sprinkled with insecticide, bitter apple, pepper, or camphor, tightly done up in brown paper, carefully pasted down, to leave no loophole for a wandering moth to creep in, and then rolled up in old sheets, &c. For furniture in ordinary use, the only chance lies in the constant application of turpentine and periodical examination.

DAIRY COOK—Take quarter pound flour, a cupful of lukewarm water, tablespoonful of melted butter or oil, and one or two whites of eggs; put the flour into a basin, making a hollow in centre of heap, add the butter and then the water slowly, stirring well all the time, beat thoroughly until the batter is perfectly smooth; then, having also beaten up the whites of eggs to a white froth just before using the batter, stir them in lightly with an iron spoon; have a large quantity of clarified fat, oil, or lard in frying-pan; the moment it begins to give off a blue vapour it is ready for use; having dipped the fish in the batter, lay it neatly in the pan, and have either a frying basket or perforated fork at hand to receive it when cooked; do not put too much fish in at once or fat will be cooled.

MADDER—First shake the curtains until no more loose dust will shake off, then put them into warm soap-suds and let them remain twenty-four hours. Now pour off the suds and put them into fresh clean suds, each time squeezing the lace in parts when dipping it over and over again. Do not rub the lace on a board nor pound it violently in the tub, but keep on renewing the suds and squeezing the fabric until clean. Now rinse in two clear waters, and finally in starch-water made by adding one gallon of moderately thick starch to one gallon of clear or blue water. This process of starching gives a more even result than the ordinary method. Stiffly starched curtains are never used now, nor is lining commonly used—curtains being preferred. Curtains are more easily dried, of course, on regular stretchers; in lieu of which they must be shaken out, the edges all pulled out and shaped with the fingers, and then pinned down on sheets on the floor, a pin holding each scallop in its proper place. Two curtains (if alike) may be put down with one pinning one over the other.

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ALL LETTERS to be Addressed to the Editor of THE LONDON READER, 26, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

*. We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

LOW TIDE IN THE MORNING.

AT about three o'clock every morning all human beings and animals are nearer to death than at any other hour. At that time cattle stir and moan in their sleep, while men turn uneasily in their beds and awaken partially or wholly, as though a hand had been laid upon them. Three in the morning is an hour that doctors and nurses dread, for by far the majority of deaths occur about that time.

It has been observed that at three in the afternoon a man's mental and physical forces reach their highest, and it is a simple inference, under the law of periodicity, that the corresponding hour in the morning would mark the lowest point of the vital tide.

To the operation of this principle (that of culmination, crisis and decline) there seems no limit in our affairs and experiences. A written statement now before me concerns the illness and final recovery of a man whose case illustrates the mysterious influence we are discussing. Taking the facts in regular sequence, as he presents them, we shall come upon the point of especial interest.

"For many years," he relates, "I suffered from indigestion and liver complaint. Indeed my liver was more or less congested nearly all the time. I *sank far below the level* of a natural life, being heavy, tired and depressed and without energy to meet the ordinary demands made upon me. I had a foul taste in the mouth, and a sallow skin coloured with the bile, with which the disease filled the blood.

"At the right side in the region of the liver was a constant sense of tenderness and a dull, persistent pain or ache. As for an appetite I can hardly claim to have known the meaning of the word. After eating even the simplest, and what is understood to be the most digestible food, I was taken with pain around the chest and sides. So bad and severe was this that I became afraid to eat, and postponed or avoided eating so far as possible.

"I attended to my duties and got through my work, but not properly nor with satisfaction to myself. For no man can work under these circumstances as he does when backed by health and vigour. Now feeling a bit better and then

down again I continued in this condition for years. Then came a time when the disease appeared to *reach a point which threatened my life*. My state was so serious that I was attended by three medical men, who agreed on the nature and gravity of my ailment and its dangerous symptoms. Yet they were unable to relieve me.

"This was in April 1887, and, contrary to the expectations of my friends, I lingered on until the following June, feeble and wretched and without hope. My long-standing malady had *fixed its grasp upon me* and I was sinking beneath its pressure.

"At this time I was urged to try Mother Seigel's Syrup. Desperate cases cured by it were mentioned, and reasons why it was likely to do me good, even in the face of the failure of the multitude of medicines I had already taken. I could but yield to these arguments and began using the Syrup as soon as it could be procured.

"The result must be set forth in few words, as this letter is getting too long. In a few days I felt somewhat better. This struck me like good news from a far country. Hope lighted up in my mind and I kept on using Mother Seigel's Syrup. Every week saw a further improvement. Food was welcome now because it was palatable, and digested naturally and gave me the strength of which I was in so sad need. A little later I was able to return to work—something which only a few months before looked as impossible as realizing a dream of finding money.

"Since that time I have enjoyed good health, and am indebted for it to the use of Mother Seigel's Syrup at a period of my illness when this world (so far as it concerned me) appeared hardly worth a shilling. You are at liberty, for the sake of others, to publish my statement." Sidney Strapp, 52, Langley Road, Luton, Bedfordshire, January 27, 1899.

Doubtless there is not one of us who is not often much *nearer death* than he imagines—especially among those who have some inherent weakness or chronic disease. The only safeguard is health, and that is always promoted by the frequent use of Mother Seigel's Syrup.

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PART 466. VOL. LXXIII.—JANUARY, 1900.

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